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BY THE OPEN SEA



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# BY THE OPEN SEA

BY  
"AUGUST STRINDBERG

AUTHORISED TRANSLATION BY  
ELLIE SCHLEUSSNER



LONDON  
FRANK PALMER  
RED LION COURT

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FIRST PUBLISHED 1913

## CHAPTER I

A FISHING boat was sailing on a May evening with a side-wind across an open stretch of the southern part of the Stockholm Archipelago. The Skerries, with their well-known three pyramids, turned blue in the distance and as the sun was setting, clouds began to gather in the clear evening sky. The waves dashed against the headlands, and an ominous flapping of the square sail showed that the land-wind was dropping before the newly awakened sea-breezes which seemed to blow from all directions.

The Inspector of Customs of the East Skerries, a giant with a long black beard, sat at the helm, occasionally exchanging glances with his two subordinates who were sitting before him, one of them engaged in working the sheet which held the large square sail in the wind.

Every now and then the helmsman glanced at the little man who was cowering close to the

mast, nervous and shivering with cold, from time to time peevishly tucking his travelling-rug more tightly round his legs.

It was evident that in the inspector's eyes he was nothing but a grotesque little object, something to sneer and laugh at, for he frequently turned to leeward and spat, in order to hide the laughter which he seemed unable to suppress.

The little man was dressed in a beaver-coloured spring overcoat, a pair of moss-green trousers, very wide in the leg, laced boots made of crocodile leather and brown spats with rows of black buttons. His shirt front was completely hidden, but he wore round his throat a pale yellow silk muffler. His hands were well protected by salmon-coloured kid gloves with three buttons; round the right wrist he wore a heavy gold bangle, made in the shape of a snake biting its own tail; the fingers of the gloves plainly revealed the fact that he was wearing rings. His face, as far as one could see it, was haggard and deadly pale, a small, thin, black moustache, turned up at the ends, accentuated its pallor, and gave its expression something exotic. He had pushed his hat on the back of his head, so that his black hair was visible, cut in a straight fringe across his forehead and looking like a little skull-cap.

But what seemed to fascinate the man at the helm more than anything else was the bangle, the moustache and the fringe.

During the long cruise from Dalarö, the sea-side place, the helmsman, who looked upon himself as a wit, had attempted to enter into a facetious conversation with the Superintendent of Fisheries, whom he had orders to take to the station in the East-Skerries. But the young *savant* had received his quips and familiarities with so much insulting indifference, that the inspector became more and more convinced that the Superintendent was a snob.

The breeze freshened after they had left Hansten, the furthest island, behind them, and started on the more dangerous part of the voyage. The Superintendent of Fisheries, who held a chart in his hand on which he had entered the replies to his occasional questions, now put it into his pocket and turned to the helmsman.

'Please be a little more cautious in managing the sails,' he said in a voice which sounded more like a woman's than a man's.

'Are you afraid, sir?' asked the helmsman with a sneer.

'Yes, I don't want to risk my life,' answered the Superintendent of Fisheries, 'I value it too much.'

'More than that of others?' remarked the helmsman, disapprovingly.

'Well, yes, since it is my own. And there are risks attached to sailing, especially to sailing with the square sail.'

'Think so? You know all about the square sail, I take it?'

'I know nothing at all about it! But I have eyes to see where the full force of the wind strikes. I am able to calculate the resistance offered by the weight of the boat, and I can easily tell when the sail is going to jib.'

'Then you'd better take the helm yourself,' replied the helmsman, gruffly.

'Oh! no. That's your business! I don't sit on the box when I travel on the King's business.'

'You mean, of course, that you don't know how to sail a boat.'

'Even if I didn't, I'm sure it's easy enough; every other schoolboy and every single customs officer can do it. I should have no need to be ashamed of my ignorance. But be careful, I tell you, I don't want to get wet and spoil my gloves.'

There was nothing more to be said, and the inspector, who was the highest authority on the East Skerries, felt snubbed.

After a turn of the wheel the sail filled again, and the boat steered a straight course

to the island; the passenger could see the white-washed walls of the custom-house which shone blindingly in the light of the setting sun.

One by one the islands in closer proximity to the coast disappeared, and it soon became evident that the boat had travelled beyond the shelter of the land. She had reached the open sea, stretching out before her in its boundless infinity, darkly threatening in the east. No more chance of cruising under the lee of islands and islets; no possibility, in the event of a storm, to reef the sails. Their way lay straight into the heart of the threatening peril, across the black chasm to the little islands which looked no bigger than buoys cast into the ocean.

The Superintendent of Fisheries who evidently valued his life, and was sufficiently intelligent to be able to realise the insignificance of his power of resistance against the illimitable powers of almighty nature, felt uncomfortable. With his thirty-six years he was far too clear-sighted to over-estimate the discretion and courage of the helmsman, whose tanned face and black beard did not inspire him with confidence. He knew that no arm, be it never so muscular, could successfully strive against a gale which blew with a pressure of several thousand pounds against



an unstable sail; he recognised the kind of courage that is founded on lack of sound judgment. What folly, he thought, to risk one's life in a small, open boat, when there are such things as decked ships and steamers! What incredible foolishness to hoist so large a sail on a mast made of pinewood which bends like a bow in the grip of the gale! The lee-shroud hung limply, so did the bobstay, and the full pressure of the gale lay on the weather shroud which, he felt sure, was rotted almost through. He was no longer willing to trust to such a doubtful chance as the more or less questionable stoutness of a few hempen ropes; at the next gust of wind, therefore, he turned to the man at the hal-yard and said curtly, in a commanding voice :

'Lower that sail!'

The man stared aft, awaiting the helmsman's orders, but the Superintendent of Fisheries repeated his command with such firmness that the sail dropped.

'Who the devil's in command here?' shouted the inspector, furiously.

'I!' replied the Superintendent of Fisheries.

He turned to the two men with a fresh command :

'Take your oars and row!'

The men obeyed silently. They took their oars; the boat shipped water repeatedly, for

the angry inspector had left the wheel. 'Steer the boat yourself, then,' he growled.

The superintendent sat down at the helm and seized the tiller before the inspector had finished swearing.

The thumb of his kid-glove split at once, but the boat righted herself. The inspector, smiling in his beard, took an oar, prepared if necessary, to keep her on her course.

The superintendent had no time to watch the sceptical sailor but stared strenuously to windward. Soon he could distinguish the swell with its long downward slope from the wind-tossed wave with its short waterfall. A quick glance aft, measuring the drift, and a mental note of the current in the wake left him no doubt as to the course he ought to steer to prevent the boat from being driven past the East Skerries.

The inspector who had for some time tried in vain to attract the black, burning eyes, so that they should become aware of his smile, abandoned his purpose; it seemed as if those eyes would have nothing to do with him, as if they purposely avoided contact with something which might trouble or pollute them. His efforts frustrated, he became depressed and absent-minded. After a while he began to watch the manœuvres.

The sun was now touching the horizon and

the waves broke, dark purple, almost black at the base, deep green at the hollow. Whenever the breakers rose to any height, they shone like huge emeralds, and the foam, hissing and splashing, glowed in the setting sun like champagne. The boat with her crew lay in the twilight; but, on the top of the wave, the four faces flashed up for a moment every now and then, and as quickly sank back into the gloom.

But the seas did not always break, the billows rocked and dandled the boat, lifted her up and drove her slowly forward.

It seemed as if the little helmsman could foretell the approach of a breaker. He met it with a light pressure of the tiller, stood off, or crept past the terrible green wall, which threatened to break over the boat and swamp her.

The lowering of the canvas had really increased the peril; it had lessened the propelling force and they now lacked the lifting power of the sail.

The inspector, amazed at the incredible subtlety of the manœuvring, was seized with admiration. He could tell from the constantly changing expression of the pale face and the movements of the black eyes that their owner was engaged upon calculations of the most difficult description. After he had rowed for a while in silence, so as not to

appear altogether superfluous, he thought the time had come to express appreciation voluntarily, before he was made to do so against his will.

'It isn't the first time he's sailing a boat,' he remarked casually.

The superintendent who was fully occupied and, moreover, anxious to avoid coming into contact with the man, for fear of being taken in unawares by the apparent superiority of the giant, made no reply.

His right glove had split all along the ball of the thumb, and the bangle had slipped over his wrist. When the light on the crests died away and twilight sank on the sea, he put his hand into his waistcoat pocket, produced an eye-glass and fixed it in his right eye; then he turned his head in quick succession to the right and left, as if he were making a mental note of landmarks which did not exist. Finally he asked :

'Are there no beacon fires on the East Skerries?'

'Unfortunately not,' answered the inspector.

'Any shallows?'

'A clear course.'

'Can we see the lighthouses of Landsort and Sandhamm from here?'

'Landsort yes, but hardly Sandhamm.'

'Stay in your places, then; we shall make

port all right,' directed the Superintendent of Fisheries who had worked a reckoning from the three heads and some unknown points in the distance.

The whole sky had clouded over, and instead of the May twilight semi-darkness enshrouded them. The boat rocked in what seemed to be a thin but impenetrable substance, lightless, in which the waves were but deeper shadows in the paler gloom which surrounded them, as they dived underneath the boat, lifting her up on their backs and emerging again on the other side, flattening down and mingling with the vast expanse. It became more and more difficult to distinguish friend from foe, and calculations were less and less to be relied upon. Two men were rowing on the leeward side and one on the weather side. The exercise of just the right amount of force at the right moment kept the boat afloat.

The Superintendent, who could now distinguish nothing but the two beacon fires in the south, was compelled to trust to his ears instead of his eyes. But before he had become sufficiently expert to tell a wind-wave from a breaker by the roaring, moaning and hissing of the surge, the boat had shipped water. He put his feet on the bitt to save his expensive laced boots from being spoiled. •

But before long he had mastered the har-

monics of the sea. The march of the rushing waters told him when danger was approaching. The drum of his right ear perceived the increased pressure of the wind which threatened to stir up the sea yet more profoundly. It seemed as if his acute senses had become nautical and meteorological instruments connected with the great battery of his brain behind the black fringe, covered by his ridiculous little hat.

The men who, for a moment, had given vent to mutinous murmurs when the sea had broken over the boat, relapsed into silence when they noticed her swift progress, and unhesitatingly obeyed his word of command : port, or starboard !

The superintendent had been making for the two beacon fires, and used his eyeglass to measure the distance. But the difficulty of steering a straight course lay in the fact that they could not see the lights from the houses on the skerries, because they were situated behind the shelter of the cliffs.

An hour, or perhaps a little more, had gone by since they had embarked on their dangerous voyage, when a dark object appeared on the horizon. The man at the helm, resolved not to invite doubtful advice, which might clash with what seemed to him his far more reliable intuitions, steered towards the object,

taking it for an island or one of its outlying reefs. He consoled himself with the thought that the making of any kind of port was better than this dreadful suspension between the sky and the sea. But the dark object approached with a velocity which far exceeded the speed of the boat. The superintendent began to wonder whether, after all, he had not made a mistake.

In order to examine the nature of the object, and at the same time give a signal in case the dark wall should turn out to be a vessel neglecting to show her lights, he took out of his pocket a box of wind-matches, struck the whole bundle at the same time and, for a moment, raised the hand which held it high above his head; then he flung it from him in such a way that it lit up a few yards of the surrounding sea. The light penetrated the darkness but for a second, but the picture which it revealed, vivid and sudden as the picture in a magic lantern, remained before the eyes of the superintendent long after the darkness had once more closed around them. He had seen drift-ice heeling to a shallow, with the sea breaking over it like a vaulted grotto over a gigantic druse of lime-spar. A screaming flock of grebes and seagulls arose and was shrouded again in darkness. The sight of the heavy seas had impressed the

superintendent like the sight of a coffin, waiting to receive the body of a man condemned to death. He realised in a flash the double danger of freezing to death and drowning. But the fear which paralysed his muscles, roused all the strength which lay dormant in his soul. In a fraction of a second he appreciated the full extent of their danger, conceived their only chance of escape and shouted : 'Stop !'

The men who were sitting with their backs to the ice and had therefore remained ignorant of its existence, stopped rowing. The boat drifted towards the breakers which were from three to four yards high; for a moment a wave hung over the vessel like a cupola of green glass; then it broke and went down on the other side with its enormous volume of water, spitting, as it were, the boat into safety. She was half full of water, and the men were almost suffocated by the terrible pressure of air. Three screams, like the screams of three sleepers suffering from nightmare, rang out simultaneously; but no sound came from the fourth, the helmsman.

He pointed in the direction of the island where they could now see a light a few cable-lengths to leeward; then he sank down in the stern and lay motionless.

The boat ceased rocking; they had reached



calm waters. The rowers sat on their benches like men intoxicated, mechanically dipping their oars into the water, an unnecessary proceeding, for the wind blew the small craft straight into the harbour.

## CHAPTER II

'WHAT have you got in the boat, mates?' asked an old fisherman after a friendly good-morning which the wind carried away.

'Supposed to be the Superintendent of Fisheries,' whispered the inspector who was dragging the boat up the shore.

'I see! One of those who come sniffing at the nets. He'll have a good time here, especially as he seems to be ill into the bargain,' replied Oeman, the fisherman, who seemed to be the head of the poor and humble population.

The inspector waited for the superintendent to get up and go ashore. But when the little bundle in the stern remained motionless, he grew uneasy, and climbing back into the boat, took the lifeless body into his arms and carried it ashore.

'Is he dead?' asked Oeman, not without a certain note of hope in his voice.

'There isn't much life left in him,' answered the inspector, carrying his wet burden into the cottage.

'One instinctively thought of the giant and

Tom Thumb, as the tall inspector with his burden entered the kitchen in his brother's cottage where his sister-in-law was busy at the fire. An expression of compassion for the weaker flitted across the face with the large beard and the low forehead, as he laid the small body down on the sofa.

'Here we are, Mary,' he said, putting his arm round his sister-in-law's waist. 'This is the Superintendent of Fisheries; let's put some dry clothes on him and something warm into his inside, and then he can go to bed.'

Stretched out motionless on the hard, wooden sofa, the Superintendent of Fisheries cut a pathetic as well as a ridiculous figure. The high, white linen collar clung round his throat like a dirty rag; all the fingers of his right hand had burst through his glove, and his starched wristband, soaked with sea-water, was glued to the glove by the wet starch; the small laced boots of crocodile leather had lost their shape and brightness; the inspector and his sister-in-law had the greatest difficulty in pulling them off his feet.

When at last host and hostess had succeeded in relieving the castaway of the greater part of his wet clothing and covered him with blankets, they heated some milk and poured out a glass of brandy. After taking hold of his arms and shaking him, the inspector raised

the small body with the closed eyes and wide-open mouth, and slowly poured the milk down his throat. But when the woman tried to follow suit with the brandy, the smell of it seemed to affect him like a virulent poison. He pushed the glass aside and opened his eyes wide awake now, as if he had aroused himself from an invigorating sleep; he asked to be shown to his room.

He was told that it was not yet ready, but would be so in an hour's time, and was invited to rest quietly on the sofa while he waited.

And there the superintendent lay, trying to while away an intolerable hour by a close examination of the furniture and occupants of the uninteresting cottage. It was the official residence of the inspector of the little custom-station on the East Skerries. Everything was small; the place was merely intended for a roof over his head. The white-washed walls, innocent of wall-paper, were as abstract as the idea of the State; four white rectangles enclosed a space covered by one white rectangle; impersonal, cold as a room in a hotel which is not meant to be lived in but merely serves as a temporary shelter. To hang a paper on the wall for the benefit of his successor or the Crown, had never entered into the head of either the present officer or any of his predecessors.

This dead white room was furnished with dark furniture of cheap manufacture and semi-modern in style. It contained a round dining-table made of pinewood, full of knots, stained brown and covered with the marks of plates and dishes; a number of high-backed chairs of the same wood and style, some of them balancing on three legs; a bed-sofa of the cheapest material at the lowest price, on the principle of ready-made clothes.

Everything was unsuitable; nothing was calculated to fulfil its mission, that is to say, to promise ease and rest; consequently everything was ugly, in spite of the *papier-maché* ornaments which profusely adorned the various pieces.

Whenever the inspector sat down on one of the cane-chairs, leaning his broad shoulders against its back, his movements were invariably followed by an irritating creaking, which drew down upon him an angry expostulation from his sister-in-law, and a peevish entreaty to be careful with other people's property. The inspector replied with a familiar caress and a look which left no room for doubt as to the nature of their relationship.

This discovery deepened the gloom which the appearance of the room had cast over the Superintendent of Fisheries. Being a naturalist, his conception of things permitted and

things not permitted was not the conventional one but, on the other hand, he had a strongly developed instinct for that which was expedient under certain circumstances. To see the laws of nature sinned against gave him a painful feeling of bewilderment. It was just as if he had discovered in his laboratory that an acid which since the creation of the world united only with one base, suddenly, in defiance of its nature, united with two.

It confused his theory of the evolution of monogamy from general sexual intercourse. He had plunged back into primeval ages, among savage tribes of men who lived, like the apes, for instance, in a massed and homogeneous community, long before selection and variation had created individuals and a law of the origin of species.

When his glance fell on a little girl, about two years old, with the eyes of a fish in a head that was too large, walking through the room on tip-toe, as if she were afraid of being seen, he felt certain that this dubious birth had caused strife, must have had a disintegrating, disturbing effect. It was not difficult to foresee that the moment would arrive when the living witness would have to bear the brunt of another's sin.

While he was following this train of thought, the door opened and the master of the house came in.

He was the inspector's brother and occupied the humble position of a custom-house official. He was the better looking man of the two, fair, with an open, kindly face which inspired trust and confidence.

He merrily wished them good-evening, sat down at the table by the side of his brother, took the child on his knees and kissed her.

'We have a visitor,' said the inspector, indicating the sofa on which the superintendent lay, 'the Superintendent of Fisheries, who has come to live here.'

'Oh! Is that him?' replied Vestman, rising to greet his guest.

He walked up to the sofa with the child in his arms. As he was the host, for his brother was a bachelor and lived with him as a boarder, he thought it incumbent on him to welcome his guest.

'We are simple folk out here,' he said, after a few words of welcome. 'But my old woman is quite a good cook; she was in service in good families before she married me, three years ago. But since our little girl's come, she has something else to think of. . . . Well, well, children are sure to come if people stand by each other—that is to say, not that I need standing by . . .'

The strange turn which the conversation had taken puzzled the superintendent; he

wondered whether the man knew, or merely dimly guessed, that something was wrong. He, himself, had seen how matters stood before he had been in the house for ten minutes; could it be possible that the person directly concerned had noticed nothing in two long years?

He was filled with disgust and turning to the wall shut his eyes and tried to pass away the remaining half-hour in musings of a pleasanter character.

But he had no power to make himself deaf and was compelled to listen, against his will, to a conversation which had been lively, but soon dragged as if every word were carefully measured with a yard measure before it was pronounced. Whenever a pause occurred it was filled by Vestman, who seemed to detest a silence; as if afraid of hearing something which he did not want to hear, and not feeling at ease unless he intoxicated himself with his own words.

When at last the hour had passed and there was still no mention of his room, the superintendent rose and asked whether it was not yet ready?

'Oh! yes,' replied the hostess, 'it's quite ready, in a way, that is, but . . .'

• The superintendent ordered her peremptorily to take him to his room at once, remind-



ing her that he had not come to pay her a visit but was travelling on the King's business. He pointed out that he was asking for nothing but what was his due; he had a right to the room by reason of the order which the Home Office had sent through the General Custom-House Authorities to the Royal Customs at Dalarö.

This settled the matter. Vestman, carrying a candle in his hand, accompanied him upstairs to an attic, the furnishing of which left him at a loss to understand for what purpose the hour's delay had been required.

It was an enormous room with white-washed walls, like the room below. The large window in the middle of the long wall looked like a black hole, through which darkness streamed in, unrestrained by anything in the shape of window curtains.

His bed, which was made, was of the simplest, and looked as if it had been merely raised a few inches above the floor to prevent the sleeper from lying in a draught. A table, two chairs and a wash-stand completed the whole furniture. The Superintendent of Fisheries, whose eyes were accustomed to receive a throng of impressions, was filled with dismay as he contemplated these bare necessities, which looked as if they had been scattered at random over the empty floor.

The tallow candle struggled ineffectually against the darkness; the large window seemed to devour every ray of light that emanated from the burning tallow.

He felt lost; it was as if after the struggle of half a lifetime for refinement, a good social position and luxury, he had been thrust back into poverty, among a lower class of men; as if his soul, which loved beauty and wisdom, had been shut up in a gloomy prison, bereft of all its sustenance.

These bare walls were the equivalent of the mediæval monk's cell, where the absence of all pictures, the blankness of the environment, lashed the starving imagination to feed on itself; to create bright or sinister visions, merely to people the void. The blank, shapeless, colourless nothing of the white-washed walls begot in him a desire for pictures which the cave or hut of the savage had no power to evoke, of which the forest with its ever-changing colours and contours knew nothing; a desire which neither the plain, nor the heath with its ever-varying atmosphere, nor the restless, infinite sea had ever awakened.

He was overwhelmed by an irresistible longing to conceal the walls behind sunny landscapes, gay with palm trees and parrots; to draw a Persian rug across the ceiling; to hide the plain deal floor, ruled like the pages of a

ledger, under the skins of wild beasts; to fill the corners with luxurious sofas, hang a lamp over a round table covered with books and magazines; to place a piano against one of the short walls and cover the long wall with book shelves.

And on one of the sofas should sit a dainty little woman; he did not care much who—

Thus, while the candle on the table struggled with the darkness, his imagination glowed and sparkled and restlessly furnished and beautified his room.

But ultimately it flagged; the bright visions disappeared and his hideous surroundings drove him to bed. He blew out the candle and drew the blanket over his face.

The wind shook the gable, the water bottle clinked against the glass, the draught blew through the room from the window to the door, and played with his hair which the sea-breeze had dried; it gave him a feeling as if a hand were gently stroking his head. Between the gusts of wind the great breakers beat against the hollow cliffs of the southern part of the island with a sound like the roll of kettle drums in an orchestra.

When he had grown accustomed to the monotony of wind and wave, he heard, at the moment of falling asleep, a man's voice underneath his room teaching a little child to say its evening prayer.

### CHAPTER III

ON the following morning, when the Superintendent of Fisheries awoke from a deep sleep, —the result of his exertions on the previous day and the effect of the sea air,—and looked up from his pillows, he became aware of an incomprehensible stillness and noticed that his ear caught low sounds which he had never before been able to hear. He heard every little movement of the sheet as it rose and fell with his breathing; he heard the strands of his hair rubbing against the pillow-slip; the throbbing of his pulse in the jugular vein; the infinitesimal swaying of the bed which accompanied his heart-beat. He heard the silence. The wind had dropped completely; only the hammering of the surf on the compressed air in the caves on the sea-shore was audible, rhythmically every thirty seconds.

From his bed, which stood opposite the window, he could see something like a bluer than the air towards him as if the window to swamp

was the sea, but it looked very small and stood up perpendicularly, like a wall, instead of stretching out like a horizontal plain, for the long rollers, fully illuminated by the sun, cast no shadows which could help the eye to form a perspective view.

He jumped out of bed, put on some clothes and looked out of the window. The chill, damp air of his bed-room streamed out, and an enervating hot-house air, warmed for hours by the radiant May sun, poured in.

He looked down on the rugged cliffs in whose crannies small, dusty heaps of snow still lingered, and little white anemones blossomed, well-sheltered in their beds of moss. Poor, little wild pansies, pale yellow as if starving and blue with frost, hoisted in the warm spring air the poor colours of their poor country. Lower down heather and crowberry grew, peeping over the precipitous rocks, at the base of which lay a layer of white sand, pulverized by the sea, and flaunting here and there the scattered blades of the sand-oats.

Beyond the cliffs a belt of sea-weed had been deposited which looked like a dark sash or a sand. At the very stacks of last year's with shells, pine sh-bones; closer to rown as soap, the ie border.

Washed up on the sandy beach was the crown of a pine tree, stripped of its bark, scrubbed by the sand, washed by the water, polished by the wind, bleached by the sun; it looked like the chest of a skeleton mammoth. A whole osteological museum of similar skeletons and fragments was scattered up and down the shore. Here lay a beacon which for many years had indicated the fairway, looking, with its thick lower end, like the thigh bone of a giraffe with its joint. Close to it was a whole juniper bush, strangely resembling the skeleton of a drowned cat, stretching out its white narrow root as if it were a tail.

Reefs and cliffs rose out of the shallow water, one moment shining wet in the sunshine, and in the next swamped by the sweeping, turbulent waves. But when the impetus was not strong enough to carry the heaving masses across the obstacles which blocked their way, they broke with a crash, throwing a waterfall of foam high up into the air.

Beyond them lay the open sea, the great 'flat,' as the fisherman calls it. Now, in the early morning hour, it stretched out before Borg's eyes like a piece of blue cloth, without folds or creases, but swelling like a flag in the wind. The huge, round flat would have tired the eye, had it not been for a red buoy, anchored not far from one of the rocks, which

looked like a red seal on an enormous letter, illuminating and lighting up the monotonous surface.

It was unmistakably the sea, nothing new to the Superintendent of Fisheries, who had seen many corners of the earth, but it was the solitary sea, the sea under four eyes. It was not terrifying like the wood with its dark recesses, it had the calming effect of a large, blue, candid gaze. Everything could be seen at a glance; there were no hiding-places, no ambushes. It flattered the beholder to be always, wherever he might find himself, the centre of the surrounding circle. The huge stretch of water was like a materialised emanation of the observer, existing only in and through him who, now that he stood on firm ground, felt intimate with this no longer dangerous force of nature, superior to its gigantic powers, because it could no longer reach him. When he thought of the peril he had escaped on the previous evening, of the terror, and wrath which had obsessed him in the struggle with the brutal enemy he had outwitted, he smiled magnanimously at the vanquished foe, blind tool of the gale, now lying before him stretched out luxuriously, resting in the sunshine.

He was on the East Skerry, classical because of its old history, because it had lived,

flourished and decayed; the old East Skerry, which had been a good-sized fishing village in the Middle-Ages, where that important article, the strömming, was caught. Special guild regulations had been drawn up in those times for the fishing village and have been preserved to this day.

The strömming has been to the North of Sweden and Norrland what the herring has been to the West Coast of Sweden and Norway; it is, indeed, nothing more or less than a herring adapted to the smaller conditions of the Baltic.

Very much sought after at times when the herring is rare and expensive, less coveted when it is plentiful, it has long been the staple winter food of Central Sweden. There is an old song in which the Frenchmen, whom Queen Christine had induced to immigrate, complain of the eternal black bread and the everlasting strömming. A generation ago the big land-owners still paid their servants' wages in herrings; when the herring fishing declined, they paid in strömmings. The price went up and the fishery which until now had been of no great importance and merely covered the daily needs, assumed the more lively character of a speculation. The shallows which frequently occur round the East Skerries and are the richest in the Stockholm



*Archipelago, were worked on a large scale.* The fish were disturbed during the spawning season; the meshes of the nets became smaller and smaller. The natural consequence was that the catches decreased; not so much, perhaps, because the fish were becoming extinct, but rather because they shifted their spawning grounds and retired to greater depths. No fisherman had ever thought of seeking their retreating prey in those profounder deeps.

Scientists had long endeavoured to find a reason for the declining strömming industry, when the Agricultural College decided to appoint experienced superintendents of fisheries, whose task it should be to discover the cause of the evil and find a remedy.

This was to be Borg's main task on the island during the coming summer.

The skerry was one of the less frequented ones; it was not situated on any of the more important approaches to Stockholm. The large ships coming from the South, as a rule sail past Landsort, Dalarö and Vaxholm; from the East, and at certain seasons from the South as well, their way lies past Sandhamn and Vaxholm, while the merchantmen from Norrland and Finland generally sail through the Sound of Furu and Vaxholm.

The waterway past the East Skerriés is an emergency way. It is mostly frequented by

the Esthonians who, as a rule, come from the south-east; others use them when wind, tide, or foul weather has driven them to the north of Landsort or below Sandhamn. For this reason the island possesses only a third-class custom-house, managed by an inspector, and a small pilot station which is run from the main station at Dalarö.

Here is the end of the world! It is quiet, desolate and silent, except during the fishing seasons in the autumn and the spring. If, as it happens sometimes in the height of the summer, a yacht calls at these forsaken shores, it is welcomed as a revelation from a brighter and happier world.

But the Superintendent of Fisheries, who had come on very different business, 'to sniff about,' as the people called it, was greeted with unmistakable coldness. This coldness had first expressed itself in the indifference with which he had been received on the previous evening; the bad and cold coffee which was brought up to his room on the following morning, was but another expression of it.

Axel Borg was endowed with a very fastidious sense of taste, but through self-discipline he had acquired the capacity of mastering unpleasant sensations. Therefore he swallowed his coffee without blinking, and then went out to examine the island and make the acquaintance of its inhabitants.

As he passed the inspector's kitchen, the murmur of voices ceased; it was as if the occupants wished to make themselves invisible; they closed the door and broke off their conversation so as not to betray themselves.

With the disagreeable feeling of being an unwelcome guest, he continued his walk across the skerry and soon reached the harbour. On his way he passed a row of small cottages built in the simplest style; mere piles of stones, here and there held together by a little cement. The chimney alone was built of bricks and erected above the kitchen fire. A wooden shed was attached to the corner of one of them; another had a lean-to, principally composed of poles and loose sticks, a shelter for the pigs which were brought here during the fishing season to be fattened. The windows looked as if they had been taken from wrecks; the roofs were covered with anything of any size which could absorb rain or allow it to run off: sea-weed, sand-oats, moss, turf, mould.

Such were the shelters which, though at present forsaken, accommodated about twenty sleepers each, during the height of the fishing season; in those days every cottage was a little inn in itself.

Before the most important of these hovels stood the chief man of the skerry, Oemian, a fisherman, cleaning his flounder net with a

switch. Although he could in no way be considered one of Borg's subordinates, he felt oppressed and irritated by the superintendent's presence, and was prepared to answer him sharply, should he ask any questions.

'A good catch?' asked Borg, by way of greeting.

'Not so far, but it'll be all right now that Government's looking us up,' answered Oeman, rather uncivilly.

'Whereabouts are the shallows which the strömming frequents?' continued Borg, leaving the Government to its fate.

'The Superintendent ought to know that better than we do,' replied Oeman, 'he's paid to tell us.'

'Quite so! You only know where the shallows are, but I know where the strömming can be found. There, you see, I have the advantage of you.'

'Is that so?' sneered Oeman. 'We need only dip our nets into the sea and the fish are ours? I never! Well, well, one is never too old to learn.'

At this juncture his wife came out of the cottage and addressed some querulous questions to her husband. Borg saw no advantage in continuing his conversation with the unfriendly fisherman and went down to the <sup>to</sup>bour.

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On his way he passed some pilots who were sitting on the landing-bridge; as soon as they saw him, they eagerly resumed a languishing conversation and seemed very much disinclined to take any notice of him.

He was determined, however, not to retrace his foot-steps, and continued his way to the shore. The inhabited part of the island soon came to an end, and the naked skerry lay before him, desolate, without tree or shrub, for everything which fire could destroy had been burnt.

He walked along the edge of the sea, now across the fine, soft sand, now over the stones. After he had walked for about an hour, always keeping to the right, he found himself back at the starting point. He felt like a prisoner; the elevation of the little island oppressed him, the circular horizon of the sea weighed him down. The old feeling of being cramped came over him and he climbed the rocks until he reached the highest point, which was, perhaps, fifty feet above the level of the sea.

There he threw himself on his back and gazed up into the sky. And now, as his eyes could catch no reflection, either of land or sea, and saw nothing but the blue dome above him, he felt free, isolated like a cosmic disc, hovering in the ether, subject only to the law of fishermation. He felt himself utterly alone on

the planet; it was as if the earth were a chariot rushing with him through space. The gentle whispers of the breeze were but the draught caused by the rush of the planet through the ether, the roaring of the waves was the plashing of the water in its huge reservoir as it swung round its axis. Every memory of fellow-creatures, society, law and customs passed away, since he could see no single material particle of the earth to which he was bound.

He allowed his thoughts to rove like unthethered calves, ignoring every obstacle, every consideration. His fancies intoxicated him until he was almost hypnotised, as the navel-gazers of India forget heaven and earth in the contemplation of a trivial part of their physical bodies.

But the Superintendent of Fisheries was no more a worshipper of nature than the Indian devotee is a navel worshipper; on the contrary, being conscious of his superiority, and knowing himself as the highest link in the terrestrial chain of creation, he felt a certain contempt for the lower forms of life. He was well aware that the products of a self-conscious spirit are frequently far more ingenious than those of insensible nature; above all that there are things of greater advantage to man who works with a definite striving to-

wards use and beauty. But he went to nature for the raw material; although light and air can be produced artificially, he preferred the unrivalled waves of the ether emanating from the sun, and the inexhaustible source of oxygen contained in the atmosphere. He loved nature as a helper, a slave to his will. He rejoiced in his power to seduce this mighty foe and compel her to put her forces into his service.

When he had lain there for an indefinite period, enjoying the deep peace of unbroken solitude, free from all outside pressure or influence, he rose and clambered down, ready to go home.

On coming into the empty room which echoed to his foot-steps, he felt as if he were entering a prison-cell. The white squares and rectangles which formed the room in which he was henceforth to live, were the work of human hands, but they were the hands of inferior beings, concerned only with the simplest forms of organic nature. He was enclosed in a crystal, a hexahedron. The straight lines, the spaces of equal size, divided his thoughts into squares, ruled his soul with lines, brought it down from the freedom of organic life to dead forms; they cut down the superabundant vegetation of his brain with its ceaselessly changing impressions to the first childish attempts of nature to emerge from chaos.

He called the maid, asked for his boxes and started at once on the transformation of his room.

He began by covering the windows with a pair of heavy, flesh-coloured Persian curtains, which at once toned down the crude light to a softer brilliancy. A large, two-leafed table filled the empty space on the huge white floor. But the white table-top still offended the eye; he concealed it under a piece of American cloth of a warm, moss-green tint, which harmonised with the curtains and gave the room a restful appearance. He put up his book shelves against the plainest wall; this in itself was no improvement, for it merely divided it into columns, and the dark brown wood made the crude, white-washed walls appear all the cruder. But he was intent on sketching the whole before giving his mind to detail.

A nail in the wall was a convenient peg on which to hang his bed-curtains. This produced a room within a room, and provided him with a tent to sleep in, separated from the study.

Over the long, white boards with their parallel black chinks in which mud from the street, dust from clothes and furniture, tobacco ash, scrubbing-water and sweepings formed hot-beds for fungi, and refuges for wood-worms, he scattered small rugs of various



colours and patterns, which swam on the great white 'flat' like flowering islets.

Having introduced colour and warmth into his empty room, he devoted himself to the detail. First and foremost he must build up a hearth, an altar dedicated to work, the centre and pivot round which everything should turn, from which everything should emanate. He began by putting up his tall lamp on the writing table. It measured two feet in height and rose up from the green table cover like a light-house. Its china stand, painted with arabesques of flowers and animals, as unlike reality as possible, was gay with colour, and its ornamentation proclaimed the power of the human brain to modify the fixed monotonous forms of nature according to will and fancy. The painter had transformed a stiff thistle into a creeper; compelled a hare to lie flat on the ground like a crocodile and, the gun grasped between the tiger-claws of its front legs, aim at a huntsman with a fox's head.

Round the lamp he grouped his microscope, diopter, scales, deep-sea lead and bearing-compass; a warm, golden light was reflected from their lacquered brass.

The inkstand, a huge dice made of cut glass, radiated the pale blue light of water or ice. The penholders, made of the quills of the porcupine, with their vague, rich tints, gave

the illusion of animal life. The crude scarlet of the sealing-wax, the coloured labels of the boxes of nibs, the cold glimmer of the steel scissors, the lacquer and gilt of the ash tray, the bronze paper-knife,—all these trifles, pretty and useful, soon covered the table, an abundant number of halting places, where the eye could rest for a moment and receive an impression, a memory, an inspiration, so that it always remained occupied without ever growing tired.

Next he proceeded to fill the gaps on his shelves and breathe life into the empty spaces between the dark boards. And soon there stood, row after row, a varied collection of books of reference and guides, from which their owner could extract information on all things; encyclopædias which, like a semaphore, answered to a pressure on the right letter; text books of history, philosophy, archæology, the natural sciences; books of travel through all the countries of the earth, with maps; even a complete edition of Bædeker's guides. He could sit in his armchair and plan the shortest and quickest route to any given spot on the globe, select a hotel and calculate exactly what amount he would have to spend in tips.

But since all these works carried within themselves the inevitable germ of old age, he

had manned a separate shelf with an army of observation, consisting of special journals, which reported progress to him, even in the most insignificant matters. And, finally, a whole collection of skeleton keys to the knowledge of the age, in the shape of bibliographical notices, publishers' catalogues and booksellers' lists.

Thus, shut up in his room, he could tell exactly how high, or how low, the barometer stood in all the sciences which interested him.

As he gazed at his book shelves it seemed to him that now, at last, the room was inhabited by living souls. The books were like individuals, no two of them were alike. There was *Bædeker* in scarlet and gold, resembling a man who, on a fine Monday morning, gives care the slip and starts on a journey. Others, like the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, a long procession, were dressed in black. The paperbacks wore light, gay summer dresses. The *Revue des Deux Mondes* was clothed in salmon-pink, the *Contemporaine* wore a lemon-coloured dress, the *Fortnightly* was in blue, the *Morgenländische* in emerald. Great names greeted him from the backs, like friends who had come to stay with him; he had the very best of them there, far more than they could give to a visitor, who called on them casually, and disturbed their breakfast or afternoon nap.

By the time he had completed the arrangement of his writing table and book shelves, he had recovered from the unpleasant effects of the journey; his soul had regained its strength as soon as he had re-possessioned himself of his tools; those instruments and books which had grown on him like new senses, new organs, stronger and finer than those with which nature had endowed him.

The temporary attack of fear, excited by solitude and association with enemies,—for he was not mistaken when he regarded the island population as inimical—gave way to the calm which his installation had produced. Now that he had pitched his head quarters, he sat down like a well-armed general, to sketch his plan of campaign.

## CHAPTER IV

THE wind had shifted during the night to north-east, and drift ice had floated down from the Oland Islands, when the Superintendent of Fisheries climbed into his boat to make a precursory examination of the bottom of the sea, the depth of the waters and the maritime fauna and flora.

The pilot who was acting as boatman soon grew tired of giving explanations when he saw that the superintendent, with the help of chart, lead and various other instruments, found out things which had never once occurred to him. He knew where the shallows were situated and where the nets should be cast. But this did not satisfy the superintendent who dredged the bottom here and there and brought up animals and mucilage on which, in his opinion, the strömming fed; he plumbed the depths and collected samples of loam, sand, mud, earth and gravel which he sorted, classified and carefully put away in glass bottles with labels.

Finally he unpacked a large telescope which looked like a speaking tube, and gazed into the sea. The pilot had never dreamt of the pos-

sibility of looking down into the water; struck with amazement, he asked to be allowed to put his eye to the instrument and examine the hidden profundities.

The superintendent had no desire to play the part of the magician; on the other hand he was disinclined to make premature disclosures on the nature of the problem he had come to study, and by so doing go too far in raising in the people false hopes of a successful issue; he therefore confined himself to granting the pilot's request and furnishing some popular explanations of the living pictures which unfolded themselves before the man's astounded eyes.

'Do you notice the bladder-kelp on the surface of the shallow?' he began his lecture, 'do you see that it is of a creamy yellow at the top, changes to a dull brown lower down and becomes red at the bottom? This effect is produced by the decreasing light.'

He rowed a few yards away from the shallow, being careful to keep under the lee of the skerry, so as to avoid the drift ice.

'What do you see now?' he asked presently, addressing the man who was lying flat on his stomach.

'God bless me! I do believe they're strömmings! And they're crowded together as close as cards in a pack!'

‘Now will you believe that the strömming is not to be found in the shallows alone? . Do you realise that it can also be caught in deep water? And will you believe me when I say that it should be left undisturbed in the shallows? It only goes there to spawn, because in the shallows the sun can get to its eggs more easily than in deep water.’

The superintendent went on rowing until he came to a part where the water, in consequence of the loamy nature of the ground, had a bluish-green tint.

‘What do you see now?’ he began again, resting on his oars.

‘Good Lord in Heaven! I believe those are snakes at the bottom of the sea! I can see their tails sticking out of the mud. And there are the heads!’

‘Those are eels, my boy,’ explained the superintendent.

The pilot looked unconvinced; he had never heard of eels in the sea, but Borg wished to reserve his trump cards and had no inclination to waste his energy on elaborate explanations of things only dimly realised. He therefore returned the oars to the pilot and resumed his seat at the telescope. He leant over the edge of the boat to observe with greater accuracy.

He seemed to be looking for something with ardent zeal; something which he confidently

expected to find in certain shallows, but which, of course, he had not yet found because he had not yet examined them.

They rowed about for a couple of hours under his direction. Borg frequently let down his lead or his dredge. After every attempt he leant over the edge of the boat with his telescope. His haggard face shrank with the exertion, his eyes sank back into their sockets. The hand which held the telescope trembled, and his arm grew as stiff and insensible as a wooden stick. The chill, damp wind which penetrated the pilot's thick jersey, did not seem to affect the fragile figure clad in a half-unbuttoned, light spring overcoat. His eyes were watering with the wind and the strenuous efforts he made to discover some object in the almost impenetrable element which covers three quarters of the surface of the globe, and of which the fourth quarter knows so little and romances so much.

With his telescope, which was not his own invention, but had been constructed from hints and directions given by builders of bridges and those engaged in sub-marine undertakings, he looked down into that submerged world from which the great terrestrial creation has evolved. .

The forest of sea-weed which has only just overstepped the boundary line between organic



and inorganic life, swayed in the icy ground current, resembling the curdled white of an egg. It had borrowed its shape from the undulation of the waves and reminded one of the ice-flowers which the frost draws on the window panes in winter time. Its golden leaves rocked to and fro, far below the level of the sea. The inhabitants of those mysterious regions crept through the swaying branches on their bellies, seeking cold and darkness, a place in which to hide themselves and their shame at having been left behind in the long struggle towards sun and air.

Deep down in the loam, half-buried in the slime, lay the flounder, immovable, an inert mass, unendowed with the inventive faculty of developing an air bladder which would lift it to the surface; waiting for a lucky chance which should carry the prey into its maw; without the instinct of hunting for it; turning and stretching in idleness until, for reasons of convenience, both eyes had been evolved on the right side of the mis-shapen head.

The blenny, which has developed a pair of oars in front, but is too heavy in the stern and reminds one of first attempts at boat building, raised its architectural stone head, adorned with the moustachios of a Croat, above the heraldic foliage among which it had lain, and

lifted itself for a short moment out of the mud *only to sink back into it the next instant.*

The lump-fish with its seven backs stuck up its keel; the whole fish was nothing but an enormous nose, scenting out food and females; it illuminated for a second the bluish-green water with its rosy belly, surrounding itself with a faint aureole in the deep darkness; but before long its sucker again held safely to a stone, there to await the lapse of the million years which shall bring delivery to the laggards on the endless road of evolution.

The hideous scorpene, fury incarnate, with the expression of frenzy in the uvulas of its face, with fins which have become claws, better adapted for torture than for attack and defence, lay voluptuously on its side, caressing its body with its slimy tail.

Nearer to the surface, in the lighter and warmer water, swam the beautiful but melancholy sea-bass, perhaps the finest fish in the Baltic. Well built and plump, but still a little clumsy, like a ferry boat, nature has endowed it with the bluish-green colour, peculiar to the Baltic, and the general character of the North: philosopher and pirate rolled into one. A sociable hermit, a surface fish, fond of deep water and frequently to be found there; an eccentric idler who lies motionless in the water, staring at the rocks, until sud-

denly it wakes up to its surroundings and darts away like an arrow; a tyrant to its own kin, yet quickly pacified; fond of returning to its haunts and harbouring seven worms in its bowels.

The eagle of the sea, the king of all the fish in the Baltic, the slender, sun-loving sea-pike, rigged like a cutter, sporting bright colouring since it need fear no rival, lifted up its nose above the surface and fell asleep with the sun in its eyes, dreaming, perhaps, of flowering meadows and inaccessible birch woods, of the transparent, blue ether which spans its damp world, in which it would suffocate, although the birds with their hairy fins swim through it with such consummate ease.

The boat had run into the drift ice; the shadows of the great floes glided over the forest of sea-weed like clouds. Borg, who had for hours vainly tried to discover what he sought, now took his telescope out of the water, carefully dried it and put it aside.

He sat down in the stern, covered his eyes with his hand and seemed to fall asleep. A few minutes elapsed before he made a sign to the pilot to go on rowing.

During the whole morning the attention of the superintendent had been rivetted on the bottom of the sea; it was only now that he seemed to notice the exquisite beauty of the panorama which unfolded itself before his eyes.

The colour of the water which lay stretched out before him was of the deepest blue as far as the spot where the drift ice began to reproduce a perfect arctic landscape. Islands, bays and fiords were marked as if on a huge map. In places where the ice was jammed against the reefs, mountains had been formed, block climbing on block, pressing down the preceding one. The floes lay piled up on the tops of rocky islets, forming vaults and grottoes, towers, ruined churches, citadels and bastions. The fascination of these formations lay in the fact that they looked as if they had been fashioned by a gigantic human hand; they were unlike the vague shapes which insensible nature produces, and awakened memories of human handiwork of long past historical epochs. In one part the ice floes were heaped up like walls built by Cyclops, and arranged in terraces like a Græco-Assyrian temple. In another part the tireless waves had excavated a Romanesque barrel-vault and carved out an arch; in settling down the latter had been transformed into a Moorish horse-shoe which the rays of the sun and the spray had honeycombed and hacked into stalactites. Here the rollers had cut into an already finished wall a canal with the roof of a Roman aqueduct; there were the foundation walls of a mediæval castle, showing traces of tumbled-down Gothic arches, gables and turrets.

This see-sawing on associated ideas between arctic landscapes and historical architecture, induced in the observer a peculiarly dreamy and *hovering* mood from which he was ultimately roused by the noisy demonstrations of life, proceeding from the flocks of migratory birds which populated the ice islands and the clear blue water.

Eider-geese were here in their hundreds waiting for open water in Norrland; the insignificant rust-brown females crowded round the beautiful snow-white males which rose every now and then for a short flight, showing their jet-black breasts. Divers were present in smaller flocks, easily distinguishable by their grey breasts, reptile necks and, when they alighted, their wonderful wings, marked like a chess-board; legions of restless grebes, black and white, swimming, diving, flying; the small fry of the guillemots and puffins; flying columns of sinister, coal-black coots stood out from among the more brilliant groups of gossanders and saw-bills with their tufted heads. But above the whole diving and fluttering amphibious army hovered the sea-gulls which have chosen the air as their habitat, and use the water only as a fishing and bathing ground.

A solitary crow had made its way into this busy, hustling world and perched, half hidden,

on the skerry. With its suspicious colouring, its low forehead and thieftish ways, its unmistakable criminal type, its dirty, unwashed appearance, it formed an object of hatred to the industrious community which knew it only too well as the spoiler of their nests, the ravisher of their eggs.

From this winged world, whose throats were able to set the atmosphere trembling over the heads of the silent world down below in the water, rang out a symphony of sound, ranging from the low, feeble attempt of the hissing reptile to give voice to its anger, to the music produced by man's harmonious organs of sound. The eider-geese hissed like an adder, as its mate bit its neck and tried to push it under water; the saw-bill croaked like a frog; the terns screamed; the sea-gulls cried like children; the eider-ducks wailed like cats in the pairing season. But clearly audible above all the din and clamour, on a higher and more beautiful note, arose the wonderful music of the grebes. It could not be called song; it was a false triad in sharps, sounding like a shepherd's flute as it rose, forming an imperfect chord with the three notes of the others, a canon for bugle calls without beginning or end; memories of the childhood of mankind, the first ages of hunters and shepherds.

The watcher did not look upon the great

spectacle with the dreamy eyes and the dark, and therefore troubling and vague emotions of the poet, but he saw with the calm eye of the scientist and thinker the connexion in this apparent chaos. The immense stores of knowledge laid up in his memory enabled him to discover the relationship which existed between these things. And as he speculated on the cause of the overwhelming impression which just this particular aspect of nature made on him, and found the answer to the riddle, he was filled with the inexpressible joy which the most highly developed being in the chain of creation is bound to feel when the veil which lies over the hidden mysteries is lifted for him; the happiness which has accompanied all creation on the infinite road to light and was, perhaps, the impelling power which led humanity from the world of dreams to the world of knowledge; a happiness rivalling the bliss which a potential creator might feel in realising his creation.

The spectacle offered by this landscape transported his mind to primeval ages, when the whole earth was submerged and only the highest mountain tops showed above the water. The skerries still preserved the character of the primary formations with their primitive rocks climbing straight up to the light. But down below, in the water, where

*at the same time the algae of the cooling period had appeared, swam among the first fishes the ancestor of the herring, while on the skerries the ferns and club moss of the carboniferous period still flourished. Nearer to the continent, on the bigger islands, the conifers and reptiles of the secondary period could be found; and still further inland the trees and mammals of the tertiary. Out here, in these primary formations, capricious nature seemed to have skipped all periods of stratification. Seals and otters had made their appearance in the primary ages, and only this morning the glacial period had been flung into the quaternary like garden mould on a primitive rock. And there was he, himself, the representative of historical time, enjoying, undisturbed by the apparent chaos, those living pictures of the history of creation, his enjoyment heightened by the knowledge that he occupied the highest rung in the ladder.*

This was the mystery of the spell which the landscape wielded; it was the story of creation with omissions and abbreviations. It enabled the beholder to travel in a few hours through all the stages of evolution, while he remained where he was. He could indulge in the rejuvenating sensations which lead the mind back to first origins; rest at stations long left behind, relax the wearying tension



inseparable from the effort to reach a still higher stage on the upward path; sink into a healing trance and feel at one with nature.

Such moments compensated him for the loss of his religious ecstasies; the longing for heaven was but the desire for progress in a different form; the dream of immortality a dim anticipation of the indestructibility of matter.

What a wealth of re-assurance lay in the thought that one's home was this same earth which had been represented to one's childhood as a vale of sorrow to be traversed on the way to the unknown! What unspeakable comfort was contained in the knowledge that science had investigated what had been hitherto unknown; had penetrated what had been called 'God's mysterious ways'; had fathomed all the manifestations which had been regarded as inscrutable, because no-one knew how to solve their riddles. Now the truth of the origin and destiny of man stood revealed. But instead of withdrawing from the arena, weary of the struggle, as one civilised nation after the other had done when it had come to the end of its thought capacity, the generation now living had resolved to accept the doctrine of man's descent from the beast world, and realise the dream of Heaven in a practical manner here below.

Surely the present age was greater and better than any of the ages which had passed away. It had done more for the enlightenment of mankind than all the centuries which had slipped into eternity.

## CHAPTER V

AFTER the superintendent had reverently bowed his head before the Unknown God, in communion with his thoughts on human origin and destiny, he revived, in memory, the story of his personal evolution, tracing it as far back as he could, so as to meet, as it were, his innermost self, and read in the past pages of his life the destiny which probably awaited him in the future.

He thought of his father, the late major of the garrison artillery, one of those indefinite types which marked the beginning of the century; a character composed of many parts, like a conglomerate; the refuse of past epochs, collected at random after the great explosion at the end of last century, and cemented together. He believed in nothing, for he had seen with his own eyes that everything passes, that everything comes again; he had seen nations trying every form of government, greeting new systems with shouts of acclamation and abolishing them in a few years' time; he had seen abolished systems resumed and lauded as epoch-making discoveries. Finally

he had clung to existing facts as the only comprehensible verities, indifferent to the question as to whether they had been called into existence by a governing will—which was improbable—or a group of accidents—which was fairly certain but unwise to affirm.

A few years at the University had converted him to the pantheism of the Neo-Hegelians, a clever reverse of the philosophy which was at that time pushed to extremities: nothing was real except the individual and God was the essence of individuality in humanity. This vivid conception of the intimate union of man and nature, with man as the highest link in the chain of the world-process, attracted a group of distinguished men who secretly despised the ceaseless efforts of political enthusiasts, to place themselves outside the inexorable laws of nature and, with the help of philosophical systems and parliamentary resolutions, discover new cosmic laws. They went their way unnoticed, of no practical use to high or low. Above, mediocrities gathered, through natural selection, round a mediocre monarch; below, they found ignorance, credulity and blindness; in the middle-classes an exclusive interest in trade which prevented them, as they were not traders, from becoming their allies. Being capable, clever and honest men, they were promoted

as opportunity arose; but as they belonged to no party, had no inclination to waste their time on private opposition, were not sufficiently numerous to form a party by themselves and, moreover, being strong individualities, objected to running after a bell-wether, they remained pretty much in the background, concealing their displeasure beneath grand-crosses and orders, smiling like augurs whenever they met at council-board or upper house, and letting things take their course.

Borg's father was a member of the aristocracy, but his title was not a very old one. The family had been raised to the peerage for services rendered to the country in connexion with the development of the mining industry, and not for questionable deeds in times of war, more or less attributable to natural coincidents or mistakes made by the enemy. Together with the title they had won some extremely moderate privileges. They were allowed to wear aristocratic uniforms and occupy honorary posts in the administration of the country. Major Borg therefore belonged to that section of the aristocracy which had won its privileges by distinguished service.

The consciousness of being the descendant of highly gifted ancestors acted like a spur on their living representative. Money legitimately gained by the labour and talents of his

forbears enabled him to choose any profession he liked. He became a distinguished topographer and took part in the construction of the Göta Canal and the building of the first railways.

His constant occupation with the kingdom as a whole, which, depicted on a map and spread out on his writing-table before him, he was in the habit of taking in at a glance from above, gradually developed in him a faculty for dealing with things on a large scale. Seated in his arm-chair, ruler in hand, he would open a new trade-route which transformed the physiognomy of a landscape, buried old towns and created new ones; altered the price of commodities and opened up new sources of revenue. The map must be remade, the old water-ways forgotten; the straight black lines which stood for the new railways were the only lines which mattered. The heights should become as fertile as the valleys; the fight for the rivers should cease, the borders between kingdoms be wiped away.

Persistent reflection on the fate of countries and nations begot in him a strong feeling of power. Without knowing it, he gradually gave way to that inseparable concomitant of power, the inclination to over-estimate his own value. He fell into the habit of taking a bird's-eye view of everything; the countries

became maps and men and women leaden soldiers. When the topographer succeeded in razing to the ground a mountain, the denudation of which would have required thousands of years in the ordinary course, he felt something of the joy of the creator. When he ordered tunnels to be blasted, sand-hills to be transported and cast into the lakes, moors to be filled up, he could not help a feeling that the re-modelling of the surface of the globe had been given into his hands, for was he not throwing the legitimate geological formations into chaotic disorder? And all this fostered the rapid growth of his self-conceit.

Another factor was his social position; he was an officer with a great many subordinates with whom he communicated only by word of command; upon whom he looked as the muscles which existed solely for the purpose of serving his cerebral volition.

Endowed with the physical courage and determination of the soldier, the thoroughness of the scientist, the sober-mindedness of the thinker, the calm of the financially independent, the dignity and self-respect of the man of honour, he appeared as a type of the highest order, a type in which beauty and intellect had contracted a union, the result of which was a discreet and harmonious personality.

The father was an example as well as a

teacher to the son who had lost his mother at an early age. To spare his boy the bitter moments of disillusionment, and also because he disapproved in its entirety the actual method of education which, he held, with its fairy tales and ghost stories produced children instead of men, he ruthlessly pulled aside the curtain which hangs before the temple of life and initiated his son in the difficult art of living. He made him see the intimate connexion between mankind and the rest of creation; told him that although man had reached the highest stage of evolution on his planet, he had by no means arrived at the goal; that he could, to a certain extent, limit the effect of the natural laws, but was still ruled by them.

His creed was a sensible nature worship, if by nature all existing things are understood, and by worship the appreciation of the fact that men are dependent on the natural laws. In this way he rendered the boy immune to the megalomania of Christianity, destroyed in him the fear of the unknown, of God and death, and produced an intelligent man who watched over his actions and took their consequences on his own shoulders.

He sought the regulator of all base desires of the human heart in that organ which through its more perfect development differentiates mankind from the beast-world: in



the cerebrum. Judgment founded on universal knowledge should control the lower instincts and, if necessary, suppress them, so as to keep the type up to a high standard. Feeding and the desire to propagate the species were the lowest instincts; man shared them with the vegetable kingdom. Emotions, as the humble thought-rudiments of the animals are called, were located in blood vessels, the spine, and certain other of the lower organs, and for that reason a human being of the higher type should unquestionably subordinate them to the cerebrum. Those members of the human family who were unable to regulate their base desires, were inferior types.

Therefore the old man warned him to beware of youthful enthusiasm which, he said, was as likely to lead to crime as to virtue. An exception, however, were the great passions which benefited mankind in general, because they were not emotions but powerful expressions of the will to good.

Nothing accomplished by youth could be of any real value since, as a rule, its accomplishments lacked originality and represented mainly the thoughts and ideas of their predecessors, adopted by the next generation as its own and hawked about with much flourish of trumpets. Originality could only exist in a mature brain, just as propagation in the

true sense, and the consequent education of the offspring, could only take place when the man had attained to manhood and was in a position to provide for the education of the child. A sure proof of the inability of the immature brain to form an opinion was the conceit so characteristic of women and young men. 'The future belongs to the young' was a fallacy, because statistics showed a smaller number of deaths among mature men than among adolescents. The quite witless retort : 'Youth is a fault which the years will correct' did not affect the fact that youth, while it lasted, was a defect, a deficiency, and therefore a fault. This was admitted by saying that it would pass away in the course of time. That which did not exist could not pass away.

All the attacks of the young on existing institutions were so many hysterical outbursts on the part of the weak, incapable of bearing pressure; attacks as senseless as the attack of a wasp which, by its indiscretion, courted certain death. An excellent proof of the lack of ability to draw a conclusion and form an opinion was furnished by the history of the well-known book *Robinson Crusoe*; that book was obviously written with the intention of belittling a simple life and solitude; but in spite of this fact it had, for a whole century, been regarded by the boys of all nations as a

panegyric on life in the wilderness. And yet this life was represented in the book as a punishment for a young fool who had used the gifts of civilisation like a savage. This little characteristic disclosed at the same time the fact that in the light of ontology a youth was a very low form indeed; he clearly showed it by his predilection for Red Indians and others who had been left behind on the road of evolution. The same thing applied to the emotions; in the days to come they would be shed like the thyroid gland which served no purpose, but had not yet disappeared from the human body.

As the boy could not oppose these bitter truths with any arguments founded on reason, he declared that his feelings, his most sacred feelings even, were outraged by these dry doctrines. His father replied by calling him a wasp which still thought with its ganglia. He warned him of the dangers of an exuberant imagination, or of drawing inferences without sufficient reasons or abundant data, not to be confused, however, with the swift, scientific intuition which could draw new conclusions from, apparently, few suppositions, few, because the connecting links had been forgotten. Then, as in a chemical amalgamation, two older conceptions were fused together and a new thought was born. The science of origins

proved conclusively that the human embryo passed through all the older stages, from the amoeba to the frog and thence to the human form. How could any young man doubt, therefore, that the intellect of a human child must pass through the whole history of humanity, from the animal and savage upwards, while its body was growing, and that, consequently, a man stood on a far higher plane than a youth?

And above everything the father counselled his son never to allow the lowest instinct, the sexual instinct, to influence his judgment. He told him that under its dominion enlightened men still clung to the superstition that woman, who was but an intermediary form between man and child—embryology proved that at one stage of its evolution the male embryo bore all the characteristics of the female, while the opposite was never the case—had reached the same high standard of development as man and, according to some views, even a higher one.

To caution the boy against the supreme power of the sexual instinct was equivalent to casting a slur on womankind. And very soon the boy began to draw *ganglia-conclusions*, as his father called it, the essence of which was that the major was a misogynist. This was not to be wondered at. Axel was

always made to listen to stories of how the life of this one and that one had been ruined by a woman; how great gifts had been rendered sterile by the effort of procreation; how happiness and career had been sacrificed to a woman who betrayed her husband, to children who died in infancy. Propagation was the business of small minds; the greater ones survived in their works.

Such was the early teaching which the boy received. He was an unusually delicate child, but he possessed a well-knit frame, was endowed with fine senses, a quick and sure power of conception, a sharp intellect and a nobility of soul which expressed itself in a charming affability and a lenient judgment of his fellow-creatures. He had learnt at an early period to live an orderly life and suppress all plant and animal instincts.

After having acquired a great store of observations and knowledge, he began to elaborate and arrange it. It soon became evident that he possessed the creative faculty—the faculty, that is, to deduce from two given facts a third unknown one, to distil new thoughts from old, in a word, originality. He was a reformer in the making, able to see the connexion in what appeared to be chaos; to discover the invisible force behind phenomena and the secret and, frequently, complex causes

which prompt human actions. Therefore his school-fellows regarded him with suspicion and the masters felt that he silently criticised what they represented to him as proven facts.

Close observation aroused in him the suspicion that everything was but a struggle for power ; the desire of one brain to control others ; to sow its brain-seed into the cortex of other brains, where it should germinate and grow, as mistletoe will grow, while the mother-tree gloried in the thought that the parasites in its crown were after all nothing but parasites.

This kindled his ambition. To satisfy it he amassed knowledge and experience through study, travel and the intercourse with well-informed and distinguished men. And, surrounded by the everchanging chaos of inimical powers and interests, he sought his anchorage, the centre of the circle which life drew round him, in himself. Unlike the strengthless followers of Christ who seek a support outside themselves,, in God, he clung to what in his inmost consciousness he held to be the truth and strove to grow into a perfect type of humanity, a man whose life and deeds should offend no one, in the certainty that the fruit of a well-pruned tree is bound to profit and delight all men.

He carefully avoided the confusion, the

errors which he saw in the efforts of those who professed to live *for* others while in reality they lived *on* others, the gratitude of fellow-creatures, the opinions and appreciation of society, and went his way without looking to right or left. He knew that one great and strong personality was of more use to the world than a whole army of irresponsible beings, whose number was in inverse ratio to their usefulness.

His way of holding himself responsible for all his thoughts and acts carried him to a high standard of morality, for instead of leaving the settlement of accounts to a dim future, he made it a rule to settle with himself forthwith; refusing to cast his sins upon an innocently suffering Christ, and conscious of his own responsibility, he committed no actions which would be likely to rouse his desire for a scapegoat.

This taught him to rely on no one but himself, never to act on anybody's advice, and always to consider the probable consequences of an action.

But in spite of all this, like all his generation, bred and born in the epoch of steam and electricity, he was a sufferer from nervous affections, a fact which was not strange when one considers that he was called upon to destroy millions of antiquated impressions

stored in the brain-cells, carefully examine and reject a number of old fallacies, whenever he was faced with the necessity of forming a fresh opinion.

It was the effort of re-construction which caused in the nervous system disorders for which alcoholism and the sexual excesses of our ancestors have been exclusively blamed. The symptom of the disease was an increased vigour, accompanied by exaggerated sensitiveness, the sensitiveness of the crab changing its shell, or the bird when it is moulting. It was the creation of a new humanity, or at least a new type of man, which appeared unhealthy to the eyes of the seniors because it was a type in formation. This, however, the seniors refused to admit, because they themselves claim to be the rule and call themselves sound, unaware of the fact that they are in a condition of disintegration.

This nervous sensitiveness increased as the youth grew to manhood, because he was abstemious in eating and drinking and kept his sexual impulses under strict control. He considered it degrading to throw himself into the state of a lunatic or a savage by partaking of fermented liquor, and his mind was far too lofty to contemplate a fleeting relationship with an abandoned woman. But the result of his abstinence was an increased acuteness of



his senses; he became so sensitive to unpleasant impressions that things frequently aroused his disgust which men with coarser senses would have enjoyed.

He would be depressed for hours if his morning coffee was not strong enough; a discoloured billiard ball, or a dirty cue were sufficient reasons in themselves to make him leave a billiard room and seek amusement elsewhere; a badly dried glass filled him with loathing; his sense of smell told him when somebody had read the paper before him; he could see the perspiration left behind by human hands on the polished surface of a piece of furniture; he always opened the window when a servant had been tidying his room.

But when he was travelling and under the stress of circumstances, he could close up all the channels which led from the senses to conception, and harden himself against all feelings of nausea.

When he had completed the study of the natural sciences at the University, he was appointed assistant at the Academy of Sciences. Natural research was the least humiliating of all pursuits, because it was a study in which opinions played a far less prominent part than the collecting of material.

In applying for this post he had been actu-

ated by a desire to be able to take in at a glance all the products collected from the various kingdoms of nature and arranged under one roof, thus to fathom, perhaps, the great connexion between all things, if there were one, or the great chaos, which seemed to him more probable.

His intentions, however, were soon discovered, especially as it was not long before he fell into the pitfall of proposing a rearrangement of the birds, on a different plan. His superiors who, of course, had no wish to be mere collectors of material for a young man, and were not over-pleased at being considered out of date, together with their work, took a quite natural dislike to the assistant who seemed to have no illusions about them.

They administered a first snub by giving the intruder trifling tasks which were of small importance and offended his sense of beauty. One of them was the changing of the spirit in the collection of fishes for six months. At first the nauseating smell caused him severe physical discomfort; but no sooner had he overcome the unpleasant sensation, than he threw himself with avidity into the study of fishes, and, being a quick worker, he was, after six months, familiar with the whole of the enormous subject. But he had spent the winter in the semi-darkness of a cold and

unclean kitchen, inhaling bad spirit, suffering from cold hands and contracting a chronic catarrh of the bladder.

His next task was the writing of labels and tickets for the algae. While at the University, he had not taken lessons in caligraphy, and as he wrote a feeble and unsteady hand, his labels were rejected. This brought discredit upon him because it made him seem incompetent : he could not even write. For two months he attended a writing-school, and sat at home in the evenings, bent over text and copy book, until, at the end of that time, he had acquired a beautiful and legible handwriting. In addition to this he had vastly improved his acquaintance with the algae.

His chiefs who had expected him to scorn the drudgery, soon perceived that he did not mean to be got rid of so easily, but on the contrary knew how to turn all affronts to his advantage, increased his knowledge, cleverly parried all rebuffs and, as a rule, managed to steer clear of unpleasantness.

His increased skill in writing, however, was made a source of fresh humiliation, for now he was set to make clear copies of all official letters and documents. It was hoped that in so doing he would sink down to the miserable level of a mere copyist. He did the work without a word of complaint. But by

simultaneously studying foreign languages, he gained an insight into the secrets of the great men, to which it was believed he held no key. He followed the scientific controversies of the time discussed in the letters, discovered the roads to the secret meeting places of the learned societies, became acquainted with the subterranean passages which led to distinctions and the chances of making one's discoveries bear fruit. He was invulnerable; no sooner was he considered down in the dust, than he arose with fresh vigour, holding up his head all the more proudly.

His double rôle of aristocrat and original thinker made him a solitary man. His name had no scientific ring; his way of dressing well and fashionably was considered proof of an unscientific mind by all those who remembered the ragged trousers of Berzelius; his patient submission, or what appeared as such, was considered a sign of inferiority; his thoughts on natural science were looked upon as the ravings of a poet.

The authorities, regretting their evident mistake in vouchsafing him a glimpse behind the scenes, and determined to crush him, bethought themselves of a fresh task, a task which, until now, every new-comer had refused, and which was therefore called the touch-stone, or the stumbling-block. There

was a collection of specimens of rock and minerals stowed away in one of the lofts, derived partly from donations and bequests, and partly from circumnavigations of the globe and foreign expeditions. As most of them had been thrown out as duplicates at a time when geology was still in its cradle, the growth and development of this science now necessitated renewed examination and careful sifting. The collection was kept in an attic under the tiles, in one huge heap, covered with dust and cobwebs.

As Borg stood under the hot tiles on the first day, breathing the dust into his lungs, his spirits sank and he almost lost heart; but when, on the second day, he found a mineral which, in his opinion, was unknown, he at once became absorbed in his work.

And now he made discoveries which completely shook his already tottering faith in the conventional doctrine of the universe. It was obvious that the rocks had not been classified by nature, but that the brain of man classified all things. Everything could be arranged and classified, provided a principle of classification be first established. He soon realised that in the present instance the principle adopted was not chosen from a common-sense point of view. And when the principle itself was only a debateable supposition like the theory that

the primitive rocks are formed by fusion in terrific heat in contrast to the stratified rocks which are layers of sediment deposited by water, while yet the primitive rocks are stratified like the later, deposited, formations, he could not shut his eyes to the flimsiness of the whole conjecture; the system was founded on guess work.

In the meantime he had analysed his mineral and found that it was an unknown one; he handed it to his chief who sent it to the Berlin Academy and succeeded in this way in having it called by his name. Borg received no word of thanks, was not even mentioned, and reaped nothing but taunts from his superior.

Irritated and annoyed, he sent his next discovery to Lyell in his own name. His treatise was read before the English Geological Society, which enrolled him amongst its members.

Colleagues and superiors ignored his success which, to a certain extent, had given his chief away, for the latter had taken the unknown mineral for a duplicate. The general dislike grew into hatred and very soon developed into persecution. He avoided his persecutors, was seen nowhere, and devoted himself to work.

As the collection of minerals was gathered

from all European countries, and Borg knew *how to give to every fresh discovery the* semblance of immediate advantage to the mining industry of each individual country, he succeeded in a very few years in being admitted into most of the learned societies of Europe, besides becoming a knight of the Italian Order of the Crown, the French Instruction Publique, the Austrian Order of Leopold, and the Russian Order of St Anne, second class.

But nothing seemed to impress his fellow-workers; their smile grew more pronounced at every distinction he won, although each was gained by sheer personal merit. When they could not deny the facts, they tried to detract from their significance; for the most part they pretended to be unaware of what had happened. This, however, did not prevent them from hunting in his trail for their own benefit.

When at last, after seven years of harassing service, his father died and left him sole heir to all his estate, he resigned his position and resolved to travel. The general comment was that he had missed his vocation and was a failure; and in a very short time public opinion would have it that he had been dismissed.

With a heart filled to the brim with boundless contempt he left his country to continue his studies abroad.

In the Continental hotels and boarding-houses he met all sorts of men, and formed many new ties which the force of circumstances soon severed. But everywhere he found men of the same generation pronouncing the same views of the same things, giving the opinion of the majority as their own, uttering phrases instead of clothing their thoughts in words. He discovered that the ruminating masses merely repeated the thoughts of a few rare intellects. All the geologists, for instance, reiterated the views of Agassiz and Lyell, formulated in 1830 and 1840; all religious freethinkers quoted Renan and Strauss; all energetic politicians throve on Mill or Buckle; all those who talked of a new literature drew from Taine. Doubtless there were but a few great batteries possessing rheomotors and they, through the conducting wires called talents, set all these bells ringing.

From hence it was but a short step to the science of psychology; he associated with spiritists, hypnotists and thought-readers, divining behind all their humbug a series of new discoveries which would surely transform the ways of men who now lived thoughtlessly like the beasts; which would, perhaps, be of value in adjusting the thought-apparatus and open our eyes to the understanding of this great and never ceasing struggle.



The war which raged over views and opinions, what was it but a struggle for the power to set the brains of others in motion? To force the majority to think one's own thoughts? He had witnessed more than one scientific quarrel which ended in the triumph of an erroneous view, if the victor had a reputation and the majority on his side. He had watched many a political and religious fight closed by legislation which was in exact contradiction to all common-sense and justice; which sanctioned fundamental errors, to be inherited by the next generation as self-evident truths.

The only thing which mattered was the enforcement of one's will. The sole motifs actuating the champion of certain views were self-interest and passion. The former was nothing but desire; desire for food and love; the possession of a certain power was essential if they were to be obtained. He who was not striving to win power was a weakling whose will to live had grown anæmic. This was the reason why all weaklings were everlastingly laying so much stress on their right; the right of the weak; yet there was but one mathematical justice, one categorical truth; its penetration, however, required a strong thought apparatus, capable of freeing itself from the delusions of self-interest and passion.

As Borg examined his inmost heart and compared himself to a number of other men, he could not help admitting that through severe self-discipline he had emancipated his judgment to a high degree; that he possessed a highly developed instinct to seek abstract justice, the truth which exists in the essence of things. He called himself a friend of truth in its purest sense, without considering it requisite to cry his thoughts from the house tops, or wrong to answer an impertinent question by an untruth.

To grasp as far as possible the organisation of the human animal, he made a special study of the psychology of the lower animals, working his way upward to mankind.

In addition he started a ledger in which he entered all individuals who had crossed his path; relatives, nurses, servants, school-fellows, colleagues, friends and chiefs; in short, all the people who had come within his circle of observation; this he elaborated by providing himself with papers and records concerning them, birth certificates and evidence given by their friends. He *formed their equation* and endeavoured to solve the problem of their lives.

Here he had an immense material to work upon. When he had reduced the confusion to order, he came to the conclusion that men,

**like animals and vegetables, could be divided into great classes, according to the principle of classification.** Through adopting more than one principle of division, he came very near to the truth and threw the fullest light possible on the object of his observation.

He divided, for instance, humanity into three sub-divisions; the conscious, the self-deceivers and the unconscious.

The conscious, or initiated, formed the highest class; they had seen through the fraud, believed in nothing and nobody, were generally termed sceptics and were hated and feared by the self-deceivers; they recognised one another at once when they met, and called each other 'scoundrel' when they parted, each one ascribing to the other base motives.

The self-deceivers included all pious souls, all hypnotic media, prophets, leaders of parties, politicians, charitable individuals, and the whole army of those feebly ambitious persons who pretend to devote their life to the service of humanity.

To the third class belonged all children, most criminals, most women and some lunatics, all of whom he considered intermediary forms between man and mammal, unendowed with the capacity of differentiating between subject and object.

Another principle of classification, the onto-

genetical principle, gave him : children, young people, women, men.

In the case of his countrymen he made a special point of ancestral race marks, drew a line of distinction between the inhabitants of North-Sweden and the people from the South; recognised the Norwegian in the inhabitants of the Swedish border provinces Vermland and Bohuslän; saw the Finn in many a man from Norrland; discovered immigrated Germans, Jews and Gipsies, thereby often finding the key to a strange trait in a puzzling character.

An additional principle of classification was a division according to the dominant characteristic of the individual. To the lowest group belonged all gluttons, drunkards and misers; next came the sensualists and all those who indulged in sexual excesses; then those governed by their emotions and, finally, all intelligent and thinking men; the latter formed the highest class.

He developed this science to a high degree. After a considerable time he had acquired the capacity to gauge an individual's character or *form his equation*. To test the correctness of his observations, he used himself as an object of psychological experiment, vivisected himself, applied fontanels and fistulas; submitted to an unnatural, frequently unpleasant,

spiritual diet, never, however, forgetting to steer clear of the mistake of looking upon himself and his life as the standard by which his fellow-creatures should be measured.

When, finally, he was tired of his voluntary exile, and his body longed for its natural milieu, he returned home and looked out for a centre of activity. Since his occupation was more or less a matter of indifference to him, he applied for the post of a superintendent of fisheries. And as nobody desired his close proximity, he was sent out as first man to the Stockholm Archipelago.

Axel Borg roused himself from the silent contemplation of his development, during which he seemed to have been born again, passing once more through all the stages of his evolution. It showed him the way to his standpoint and enabled him, by the calculation of the data in his possession, to map out his future course, his probable goal, and the chances of succeeding in his enterprise.

The pilot who during all this time had rowed about between the skerries, under the lee of the ice floes, and had come to the firm conviction that the superintendent was not quite right in his head, because he sat in his place like a statue with expressionless eyes looking inward, seized the opportunity and

asked him whether he had not better row back to the harbour?

The superintendent nodded.

He threw a last glance at the wonderful spectacle which presented itself to his eyes; he saw the ice floes swiftly approaching, saw them bursting, crowding together, jammed block against block, he saw them climbing one over the other, saw them stand on end, change and shift their horizontal positions, forming hills, mountains and valleys.

Just such a spectacle must have been presented to the sightless world at the birth of the earth crust. So must the first skin of the earth, covering the boiling sea, have burst into pieces, floated away, turned upside down and formed primary rocks, islands, skerries and islets, which were nothing but huge masses of pack ice, gigantic ice-bergs, though consisting of a substance other than water. And above this story of the creation, re-enacted before his eyes, trembled the original, undivided white light of the ice, side by side with the deep blue of the water and the atmosphere, the first light which shone upon the darkness. The God of the story of the creation, who divided the light from the darkness, appeared to his enquiring spirit as a natural cause. Once more his ear caught the first attempts of the reptiles, now transformed

into birds, to bring harmony into their notes, as they rose from the disc of water which shut him in, and in which he would always be the centre, wherever he might happen to be. . . .

The boat ran into the harbour and the smoke rising from the chimneys told him that it was time for his mid-day meal.

## CHAPTER VI

ONE Sunday morning Axel Borg was sitting at his open window. Early summer had come, tinting the water light blue, and painting the insignificant remnants of lichen and moss in the crevices with delicate shades of green. The flocks of birds had migrated to the north, and only isolated pairs of eider-ducks swam in the bays. The great solitude, as he called the Baltic, gripped his heart, as he watched vessel after vessel steering to the South, and recognised among the vivid colours of the foreign flags which, accidentally or congruously, were so much more brilliant than the Swedish, the poor blue and the faded yellow.

The rebellious tricolour floated from a brig which carried timber from Norrland to sunny, populous coasts, in exchange for a cargo of wine and oranges. The effeminate danebrog of a schooner exporting butter fluttered in the wake of a powerful German mail-boat, whose white flag, framed by a mourning edge, showed the Imperial crown like an ace of spades in the red field. The blood-coloured flag of Great Britain, the Spanish sunblind,



the American cotton bedding, they were as many greetings from foreign nations, with whom he felt more at one than with the strangers he was compelled to call his countrymen, for he possessed the privilege of wearing on his dress coat all those colours; only to those of his own country he had no right.

To-day he needed the encouragement which these reminders of his world-citizenship always afforded him, more than ever, for during the last few days he had been surrounded in his place of exile by open enmity. The resentment of the population had been aroused by his having taken steps to enforce a law which had come into operation some years before, but up to now had never been applied, a measure which provided for the use of a regulation mesh in all fishing nets. He had been met by determined resistance which had ended in open defiance, so that he had been compelled to call in the assistance of the police to seize the trawl nets.

This was not done until he had exhausted every means in his power to make the people understand that the law had been dictated entirely by the solicitude of the State for the welfare of the people; he had endeavoured to make them realise that their senseless system of fishing would end in reducing their children to beggary, more especially in view of their

unwillingness to divide their land among their sons, preferring to keep one in comparative affluence, so as to enable him to carry on the family.

Nothing had availed; all measures were deemed malicious whims of a number of unemployed officials whom the people's money had put into a position to annoy them. It was useless to tell them that the agricultural class had forced the law through Parliament; the fishermen now denounced peasants and Government alike.

Borg comprehended that he was dealing, in this fishing colony, with a remnant of primitive society, careless and reckless, without an inkling of the peasant's thought for the morrow and the next year. He had been talking to savages who hunted for two days and slept for eight. Like all savages, they possessed the negative faculty of suffering and bearing privation, without the positive one of improving their position by new inventions; they had, on the contrary, a decided instinctive dislike to all innovations. This betrayed their inability to adapt themselves to a higher stage of culture. All these fishermen were the dregs of the native race; they had been unable to hold their own in the struggle for the fertile river-valleys and shores of the inland seas, and had gone out, or been pushed out, towards

the cliffs, where the vegetable soil ceased, and only the uncertain wave offered them the gambling chance of a precarious living. They were gamblers, as unreliable as Fortune herself, unscrupulous in their means, always taking little loans on account of the ever expected stroke of luck which a good wreck might bring them.

They had hated the intruder from the very outset, for their blindness had prevented them from realising that his desire to improve their position and release them from drudgery, was rooted in his ambition. Thus, for instance, out of an old gimlet and some broken up sardine boxes he had contrived an automatic wind-gauge for the chief pilot whose business it was to furnish meteorological reports.

But the chief pilot, far from adopting it, had put it away in an attic.

He had wanted to be of assistance in cases of sickness, but his help and advice had been rejected. He had been anxious to teach the house-wives to stop the smoke from being driven down the chimneys by the erection of an old strömming barrel on the top, outside; but the women had merely grinned and continued to complain of the unavoidable smoke. He had advised a fisherman who had vainly attempted to grow potatoes, to manure the sand with sea-weed and the refuse of fish, a

method which he had seen successfully practised by the people on the coast of England, but the fisherman had refused to listen to him. When he saw the remainder of the great *strömning* catches in the spring decaying from want of salt, he had made futile efforts to introduce a process which the inhabitants of the Faroe Islands adopt in the manufacture of cheese, that is to say, the pickling of what they require for their own needs in the ashes of seaweed.

The only result of his efforts was that he was dubbed Dr Knowall, was considered a fool, and formed the standing topic of conversation whenever the women met to gossip over a cup of coffee, or the men gathered round the brandy bottle; even the children grinned at him when they passed him in the street.

At first the disparity between what he really was and what he was supposed to be, struck him as merely amusing; but gradually, as enmity took the place of coldness, he became aware of an adverse influence on his spiritual well-being. A feeling as if a thunder cloud of opposite electricity were hanging over his head, disturbing his nervous fluid, trying to destroy it by rendering it ineffectual, took possession of him. It was as if the thoughts of all those people which culminated on him had power gradually to drag him down; were

able to put such pressure on his self-esteem that the moment was sure to come when he would lose faith in himself and his intellectual superiority; when their opinion that *he* was the fool and *they* were the wise men would take hold of his brain and compel him to agree with them.

While these thoughts came and went, a new object had glided into the forty-five degrees of horizon which he could control from his window. A gunboat, belonging to the Swedish fleet, which was steaming at half-speed under the lee of the island, furled her sails and let down her anchor. Through his spy-glass he watched the sailors moving about in apparent confusion but without the slightest jostling; every one of them hurried to his cleat, his rope, his halyard, as soon as the second officer blew his whistle. The straight sides of the vessel, the up and down stem, the plates of which seemed to diverge in all directions while yet their combined energies flowed towards the bowsprit; the sturdy, tubular shape of steam-pipe and funnel, the pulling of the masts against stays and shrouds, the circular muzzle of the gun; all these things betokened an accumulation of energies which were organised, controlled one another, co-operated with and counteracted one another. The contemplation of them changed his mood. The

wedge-shaped iron hulk, in which fitness, restraint and moderation combined to form a magnificent whole, seemed to radiate strength and order. The thoughtful consideration of this thing of beauty was a greater source of enjoyment to him than the facile emotion which is awakened in the beholder by the mere outward contemplation of a fine work of art.

His reflection brought him another gift from the small, floating, water-bound community. He felt invigorated as if he had found a support in this representative of power which, sanctioned by people and Government, with the aid of all the resources of civilisation and science, protected the more highly evolved from the barbarism which assailed them from below. It gave him satisfaction to see the ease with which two or three of those superior men, after a successfully passed examination, controlled and directed by means of a whistle a hundred or so of semi-savages, who were incapable of understanding anything they could not see.

Borg had never been tempted to make that error of observation which is so common in these days, namely to believe that the lower classes find hardship in their inferior position and coarser way of living. He was very well aware of the fact that they stand exactly

where they are able to stand; that they suffer as little from their baser condition as the fish in the depths of the sea suffer from the fact that they have not advanced to the state of the amphibia. As far as the coarse food went, he knew from experience that the fishermen, whom on one occasion he had invited to dinner, despised all food which did not fill their stomachs; he had seen them picking out of the bread basket the coarse rye-bread, leaving the finer wheat-bread untouched. He believed that starvation existed only side by side with misfortune, and even then only by a combination of coincidences, for provision was made by the poor-law, a social remedy constantly abused by loafers and rogues who feigned sickness in order to force the State to maintain them.

He had never loved the poor; he had never felt a desire to bend his knee before the humble, although he was disowned by a society which, in a period of general decline, had risen to its rank by stolen merit and now pressed heavily on all those who strove to rise. He was not tempted, even now, to over-estimate this chance representative of the upper classes which, in the semblance of a gun-boat, partly commanded his admiration, partly appeared to him as a remnant of a governing principle which ruled others by means of gas and Bessemer cylinders.

A door slammed beneath him, and the newcomer set all tongues wagging. It was Oeman, whose drag net had been seized. He heard the jingling of brandy glasses, and the noise increased as yesterday's intoxication was repeated.

'Idiots and enemies of the people who think that they know more than experienced fishermen! Who lie on the sofa all day long reading books, and cost us two thousand crowns! Snivelling brats who think they can teach their elders! Thieves and cigarette heroes with pigtails under their noses . . .'

The abuse was cut short by a veritable breaker which broke on Vestman's information, founded on facts which he had gleaned on board the *Jacok Bagge*, concerning the superintendent's family, the irregular sexual relationships of his father, the low origin of his mother; hints that the superintendent had been dismissed from his previous post, and so on.

The listener endeavoured to make himself deaf and indifferent as he had so often done before, but the words bit into his soul, polluted him, hurt him against his will. Old doubts of his father's integrity, of his own worthiness, awoke; the fear of being unable to keep his skin dry in this rain of mud, of succeeding in avoiding a fight, in which he might be



worsted on account of his delicacy in the choice of weapons.

The bell went on the gun-boat, the rolling of drums came across the water, and the summer breeze wafted the grave, rhythmical, devout notes of an old hymn, sung by a hundred throats, to the shore. But from below came noise and threats and ominous growls, as from the cages of a menagerie. In the pauses of the song the growling grew into furious yells, for the party had split on the question whether or not the drag net should be recovered by force.

Axel Borg, who looked upon churches as archæological institutes, or interesting buildings of past times, like pagodas, suddenly remembered a few words uttered one night by a young clergyman during a discussion on Christian divine service. 'I don't believe in the divinity of Christ, or anything else,' he had said, 'but take my word for it, there must be a check on the mob.'

'There must be a check on the mob,' he repeated in thought, but his reverie was rudely interrupted by the sounds of a scuffle which had broken out below. Chairs were overturned, heavy heels kicked the furniture; a din like the bellowing of cattle mingled with the hissing of reptiles filled the air, and above all shrilled the voice of a woman who seemed to pour forth hundreds of words a minute.

The steamer whistled, the anchor was weighed, the sails hoisted and the funnel threw a jet-black cloud against the blue vault of the sky. With a sensation of regret, not unmixed with uneasiness, Borg watched the boat with the pretty gun disappearing in the South. It seemed to him that he had lost a support; that hatred was coming nearer and enveloping him like a sack. He wanted to fly, regardless whereto.

A child began to cry, he did not know whether from fear or pain, for during the tumult he had crept downstairs, walked to the harbour, unmoored his boat, and was rowing seawards as fast as he could.

The skerry which he was leaving behind was the most eastern of a tiny archipelago, which had not interested him so far and which he was now exploring for the first time, prompted by the necessity of being alone.

He had never learnt to row; he had a dislike of violent exercise, partly because he considered it superfluous on account of the endless variety of machines and vehicles, and partly because he thought it harmful to the function of his nervous and sensory systems, for the delicate instruments enclosed in the brainpan are as unable to bear concussion, as the building which contains the astronomical instruments of precision. But his sense of

rhythm and his well-balanced motor centres made him a skilled rower, and his knowledge of physics taught him to improve the ancient sport by raising the seat and thereby saving muscular energy.

As the skerry disappeared in the distance, he began to breathe more freely. When he landed at the first cliff, he experienced an indescribable feeling of happiness. It was a light, flat, long expanse of island; the rocks on the shore consisted of grey gneiss and formed a tiny harbour. The water was as transparent as condensed liquid air; the delicately tinted sea-weed shone at the bottom as if it were encased in a block of refined glass. The boulders on the shore were washed and polished, and offered a diversity of colours which never tired, for not two of them were alike. Between them reed-millet and sedge had found supports for their tiny hillocks. In the hollows of the gently sloping rocks lay sea-gulls' eggs, in threes, embedded in moss, coffee-brown with black spots, while the mother-birds screamed and laughed above Borg's head.

The superintendent went on climbing and reached a pile of stones erected by the surveyor of the sea and flecked with white by sea-gulls and swallows. Junipers grew here, spread out like a carpet, and an invading army of

delicate white chickweed had improvised a camp between them; it was a union of the mountain glens of Central Europe and the shadows of the Northern forests. The little sea-dotterel, bold and gay, fluttered restlessly to and fro, endeavouring to divert the attention of the intruder from its nest.

No shrub, no tree shook its crown above the half-barrer rocks. The absence of shadows, of hiding-places, made the visitor light-hearted and glad. Everything on this rock could be seen at a glance, showed itself openly to the brilliant light of the sun. And the sea, which separated him from his home among the savages whom he had just left behind, seemed to surround him with an unsurmountable barrier of clear transparency. The semi-arctic, semi-alpine landscape with its primitive formation refreshed him and calmed his mind.

When he had rested a little while, he returned to his boat and rowed on. He passed three highly polished cliffs which looked like petrified waves, naked as a hand, without a trace of organic life.

They interested him from a scientific point of view; he wondered how they had come into existence.

His boat glided past a flat skerry of reddish gneiss which boasted, to leeward, a mountain-ash, a hundred years old, solitary, gnarled,

covered with moss. A water-wagtail, for want of a tiled roof or stone-wall, had built its nest in the lacerated trunk. The coquettish little bird flew down to the shore and tried to persuade the enemy that the island harboured neither a nest nor little grey-white eggs.

The solitary mountain-ash grew on a grassy spot of several square yards, and looked not only very lonely but also unusually strong, from lack of competition; it found it more easy to defy gales, salt and bitter cold, than envious competitors who contest every inch of soil. The lonely patriarch attracted Borg, and for a fleeting moment he was conscious of a desire to build a cottage close by. But he rowed past and the impression wore off.

Now a dark cliff appeared behind the headland of the last rocky island. It was coal-black, the effect of the volcanic mineral diorite. As he drew near, a feeling of uneasiness came over him. The black, crystallised mass looked as if it had been thrown up from the bottom of the sea, and as soon as it had begun to grow rigid, engaged in a titanic fight with the water, or a thunder-cloud, for it was split into eight parts; sea and ice had washed away the fragments; or, perhaps, they had sunk to the bottom of the sea. The black, glittering walls stood up steeply, perpendicularly. As Borg moored his boat beneath them, his uneasiness in-

creased; he felt as if he were in a coal-mine, or a sooty forge.

When he had climbed the summit, he was faced by a pole which carried on its top a small, white-washed barrel. There was something disturbing, something alarming and brutal in this trace of human handiwork out here where no men lived; this triple memory of gallows, shipwreck and coal-mine; this crude contrast between the fundamental black and white, between sterile, violent nature, innocent of all organic life,—for the whole formation bore no sign of moss or lichen,—and this piece of carpentry on the primitive rocks. In the great Sunday stillness he heard below his feet, where fallen boulders had formed a roof over a cleft, the rushing of the waves into a cavity which extended almost to the centre of the skerry, driving the air before them, lashing it until it roared and bellowed, and receding again with a hollow, sobbing moan.

He stood still for a moment, amused at his uneasiness, dwelling on older sensations which had always excited in him an unpleasant feeling; he smelt the smoke of burning coal, saw factories and black, discontented men and women: they uttered words which tried to force a way through his ears into his brain, there to germinate and grow into weeds which

would choke the good seed, transform the field which he had cultivated with so much care, and trouble into a natural meadow.

When he re-entered his boat and turned his back on the sinister scene, he was again conscious of a feeling of delight as he looked at the infinite purity of the water, the blue void, which lay before his eyes like a clean slate, lulling his spirit to rest because it could not awaken old memories, evoke new inspirations or move him to any strong feeling whatever. And as he approached a somewhat larger islet, he greeted it as if it were a new acquaintance, a person who would have news for him and so efface the moods which had just swept over his soul.

More reefs and skerries swam past; each one of them had a new surprise, possessed individual features. But frequently the differences were so minute that it required a trained eye to see them. These tiny mountains which, glanced at from the swiftly passing boat, looked so barren, so deadly monotonous, offered to a closer inspection a rich and varied spectacle, just as the varieties of a given coin are only obvious to the eye of the numismatist.

He went ashore on one of the larger islets, attracted by its irregular, ragged look and the leafy tree tops which towered above the cliffs. When he had climbed the summit of the

northern mountain, whose black base had been washed clean by the seas, he noticed that the island was composed of at least four skerries, which seemed to have been blown together by winds from different quarters and, on account of the accumulation of many geological formations, created a conglomerate of landscapes borrowed from all the zones of the earth.

The northern part consisted of a cone of hornblende slate which, on the sea shore, was cleft into almost incredible shapes. The blocks had fallen from the mountain-side and had not yet been polished by the water.

Between these black boulders, as if attracted to them by a mysterious bond, grew an extraordinary quantity of black currants, sinister in colour and matching the dark, glittering stone. To meet these elegantly arrayed run-aways from the garden out here in the wilderness was something so unexpected, that it suggested that nature had been playing a practical joke. Perhaps a wounded wood-cock had held the berries in its beak as it flew here to die, and so had brought with it the seed of a new culture.

Higher up, among the heap of boulders, grew a copse of trees with light green foliage, the crowns of which were cut into shape and their trunks whitened as if a tending human hand had white-washed them. He tried to



guess the species from a distance, but the trees differed so much from all those he had seen growing in these latitudes, that his thoughts wavered between acacias, beeches and Japanese varnish-trees, so common in Southern Europe. He refused to trust his ears as he caught the well-known rustling of the common poplar, but as he approached, dodging an adder which glided past him like a rivulet and disappeared between two stones, he became aware that his ears had not deceived him. It was the stately, pretty poplar of our groves and copses, which north-wind and stony ground, drift ice and sea-salt had modified and altered until they had achieved a variety hardly recognisable. In the struggle with rough weather and bitter cold it had grown grey towards the top, had lost its crown, and therefore consisted of nothing but frost-bitten off-shoots which had burst into leaf again and again, persistently renewing themselves, while the goats had peeled off the protecting bark, allowing the sap to run away. There was eternal youth in these delicate, light green off-shoots of the grey, branch-less trunks representing a hoary old age, without the intermediary prime of life : a malformation which was refreshing because it was novel and unconventional.

When he had climbed over the sharp stones and reached the very top, he felt as if he had,

in ten minutes, accomplished the ascent of a Swedish mountain. He had left the region of the foliage trees behind; the plateau of the mountain presented an alpine flora : the alpine variety of the juniper flourished here side by side with the true northern cloud-berry which grew in the white moss of the damp gullies, and here and there specimens of the small dogberry tree, perhaps the only plant peculiar to Sweden and the Swedish archipelago, struggled for existence.

He slowly descended the southern declivity through cranberries and bearberries, red millet and sedge, wool-grass and swelling moss, until he came to a ravine. Here the cliff had been rent asunder, and a channel flowed between the black walls.

The obtrusive auks rose with wild screams as he crossed the shallow channel by a natural stone bridge and gained the opposite cliff which was of a lighter formation and formed the entrance to another section of the wonderful island.

The light, elegant eurite, the strata of pale pink felspar, the light, bluish-green quartz, the presence of mica which was betrayed by a faint shimmer resembling microscopic hoarfrost, lent an appearance of gaiety to the little landscape and offered, with its countless clefts and fissures, at every step new stone couches

and armchairs. A strong vein of granular white limestone ran, like a belt, through the whole formation; the fertile rubble, crumbled off by rain and frost, had collected below, between the fairly high mountain sides. Spread out before him was a valley of such entrancing loveliness, that Borg at first stood still with amazement and then sat down on a stone stool to enjoy the unexpected sight. Between the mountain walls which rose perpendicularly from the meadow, was a grassy level studded with flowers more exquisitely and luxuriantly beautiful than those of the continent; the scarlet geranium had climbed down from the mountain to seek moisture and warmth below; the honey-white navelwort from the damp sedge pool held a tryst with the blue and yellow cow-wheat from the wood; the southern orchids, perhaps brought hither by the wind from the wine-country, Gotland, grew in abundance. The hyacinthine elder-orchis, the magnificent helm-orchis, the stately bird-of-the-wood, a kind of glorified lily-of-the-valley, had found a hothouse constructed by nature herself out of the forcing lime, the moist air, the sheltering walls and the luxuriant grass.

The mountains in the background were covered with birches and alder trees which raised their crowns timidly, without daring to

venture too near the haunts of the winds. Scattered profusely all over the grass were guelder-roses, their white balls drooping over the foliage, so closely resembling vine-leaves. Clinging to the mountain side, as if it were trellis work, bloomed the glossy, dark green buckthorn, with leafage which is not unlike the much lauded orange tree, but possesses more sap, richer tints, more delicate tracery and a far more sensitive structure.

It was a park, an inland garden swimming out here on the waves. As his eye, through a cleft in the mountain, or a depression, caught sight of the blue, horizontal line of the sea, the striking contrast brought home to him the almost miraculous beauty of the sight.

He sat down, listening to the spring song of a chaffinch, interrupted every now and then by the screaming and croaking of the sea-gulls and guillemots. Solitude soothed him like a deep sleep. The birds were hushed for a moment, and only a faint breeze whispered through the crowns of the birch-trees without dropping to the lower branches, when suddenly the stillness was broken by a cough. He started and looked round, but could see no sign of a human presence.

The hollow sound from a human breast speaking of suffering, in this silent landscape, awoke him with a shock and brought round

him a cloud of unpleasant sensations. Was there another recluse here, in quest of peace, or had some stranger come to the island to rob the birds' nests? He must suppress his misgivings and find out.

He descended by a staircase carved by nature into the limestone and now came to a third aspect of this polypoid islet.

Stepping across a low stone wall which was obviously meant to protect the flowering meadow from the grazing cattle, he entered a pine wood, growing in gnessic soil; he crossed it, pushing his way through tall ferns which formed a coppice beneath the conifers and had the appearance of dwarf palms with greener and more elegantly shaped leaves; all around the ground was red with wild strawberries.

On the other side of the gully was a bay, fringed with reeds; some forsaken fishing-rods still stuck in the mud. He stood still to listen; now he heard a voice speaking on the other side of the rock. It was high and sweet, like a child's voice, but it had inflections suggesting that it might belong to a young sailor who had ventured so far. But the words fell from the lips of the speaker so passively, they were so attractive, so winning and inviting, that he was astonished to hear a lad expressing himself so carefully. The vocabulary was not great; it consisted of the ordinary phrases

in use among the educated classes, without any concrete, picturesque expressions, and whenever the voice mentioned any specific object, a quality of vagueness or incorrectness was always apparent. It talked of the green leaves of the trees, without giving any names to the trees; it called the guillemots sea-gulls, the chaffinch a bird, gneiss granite and the reeds sedge.

Certainly it might have been a youth who spoke with so much assurance, with such a claim to be listened to, completely ignoring the muttering of an older man who every now and then growled an objection or an explanation. Then the young voice laughed! A laughter without rhyme or reason, to judge from the conversation; a laughter for the sake of the sweet voice or the white teeth; a laughter without any cause for amusement; a succession of musical notes with no other object but the jealous purpose of drawing the attention away from intruding reality: a signal of warning! A lure! Doubtless the voice belonged to a girl.

Unable to resist he climbed the last height, adjusting his hat and tie. Then he saw before him a sight which, with all its detail, remained for ever burnt into his memory. On a small grass plot, beneath a group of old beam trees, sat an elderly lady with pretty grey hair,

dressed in a well-cut, fashionable dress; a white table-cloth was spread on the ground, a basket, containing food and a butter-cooler of Swedish marble, was placed in the centre of the table-cloth. By the side of the ladies sat a man from the skerries, obviously the boatman, in shirt sleeves, eating a piece of bread and butter. Before the embarrassed man stood a girl offering him, with a mock curtesy, a glass of beer, the curves of the dying laughter still on her lips.

Borg was immediately fascinated. Although his common-sense whispered to him that she was flirting with the lout, he felt irresistibly attracted by her dark olive skin, her black eyes and her fine figure. Certainly, she was not the first woman who had pleased him at first sight, but she belonged to a type which never failed to attract him. He could not ascribe his quick response to the solitude and his lack of female society. He felt exactly the same pleasure when, for instance, he had been trying to buy a tie of a certain shade and, after wearily trudging from shop to shop, suddenly came upon it in a shop window. The oppression was lifted as soon as his thoughts whispered to him : This is the right one !

He hesitated for a moment, undecided whether to approach and introduce himself,

or whether to turn back. A slight movement betrayed him. The girl, who saw him first, dropped her arm to her side and stared at the unexpected apparition with the look of a frightened child, which encouraged the intruder to draw near and reassure the small party with an explanation.

He raised his hat and advanced.



## CHAPTER VII

HALF an hour later the Superintendent of Fisheries had embarked with the little party in their sailing boat which took his own small craft in tow. He had assumed the position of escort to the two ladies who, seeking health, had decided to spend the summer on the skerry, and were therefore going to be his neighbours.

A pleasant conversation was soon afloat, and the three new acquaintances kept the ball rolling with that somewhat breathless zeal which the desire to show off their accomplishments and finest qualities frequently kindles in people who meet for the first time.

The old lady who had introduced herself as the mother of the pretty girl was the least excited of the three. She seemed to have attained to complete harmony and resignation, to have rubbed off all corners, and to be living in the past. She regarded everything which happened around her with a feeling akin to indifference; expected nothing from outside, was prepared for anything good or bad which life might still hold in store for her, and

inspired a feeling of liking in all whom she met by her even temperament and gentleness.

A contact had already established itself between the young man and the girl; she appeared to find delight in accepting and he, who had long waited for the happiness of being allowed to give, felt his strength growing as he found an outlet for the surplus knowledge which had been accumulating for so many years. With spendthrift hands he gave his new friends in half an hour a mass of information which he thought might be of use to them. They were unacquainted with the environment in which they proposed living for a time. He described to them all the advantages and disadvantages of the island, painting life on the skerry in the glowing colours in which he saw it now that he was no longer alone.

The girl, who had never seen the skerry, received her first definite impressions from his description. In imagination she beheld the red cottage in which she and her mother were to live in the entrancing light in which he intended her to see it, in order to make her like it and induce her to stay.

While he was speaking he was conscious of an influx of strength and goodness; her half-open lips seemed to utter new ideas, new points of view; they did not merely seem to breathe in what he gave out, but give back thought for

thought. As those two innocent eyes looked into his in admiration and astonishment, he believed that every word he said was true; he felt, with growing self-respect, new powers being born in his soul, and old ones increasing in strength and steadfastness.

He was genuinely grateful as they landed, like a man who has been helped at a time of distress. He spontaneously thanked the ladies as he assisted them out of the boat and carried their heavy portmanteaus ashore.

The girl replied to his courteous words with a smiling 'Don't mention it,' as if she had given him a trifle compared to the treasures which she still had to bestow.

As the three arrived at their destination which proved to be Oeman's cottage, the girl, still under the spell of Borg's alluring description, burst into a flood of rapturous words. And there really was something unusually picturesque in the appearance of the dilapidated little house. It did not boast one single straight line. Gales, salt-water, rain and frost had destroyed all sharp contours, and since the cement had crumbled away, the chimney looked like a great tuff.

A still more pleasant surprise was the really cosy, old-fashioned comfort of the interior. The two rooms were situated on either side of the passage; between them lay the kitchen.

The walls of the big room were hung with a dark brown paper, mellowed by age and smoke to one single, pleasant tone which harmonised with all colours. The low ceiling, instead of consisting of a large, empty space, which fancy might people with all sorts of shapes, showed the beams which supported the loft. Two small windows, with tarnished window panes, a quarter of a square yard in size, gave a view of sea and harbour. The brilliant day-light was pleasantly subdued by white curtains which warded off curious glances without darkening the room; like fleecy summer clouds they flowed down on balsam and geraniums which grew in English china pots, adorned by the portraits of Queen Victoria and Lord Nelson in green and yellow.

The furniture consisted of a big, white folding-table, a Gustavian bed with several layers of swelling eider down bedding, a wooden sofa painted white, a Swedish clock, a chest of drawers made of birch wood, and a dressing table of alder roots, swathed with a bridal veil and covered with china. A stuffed parrot under a glass shade stood on the chest of drawers. The walls were covered with lithographs representing scenes from the Old Testament; two of these, which were hanging over the bed, owed their existence to a not very lofty sentiment; one of them portrayed Samson

and Delilah in a very compromising attitude, and the other represented Joseph and Potiphar's wife. A huge fire-place took up the whole of one corner of the room; the effect would have been ghostly if the black opening had not been concealed by a white curtain running on a tape.

The impression created by the whole was one of cosiness, cleanliness and sweet simplicity.

The other room, which resembled the first one, had two beds, a washing stand, and two or three strips of floor carpet, made of many pieces which, with their varied colours, formed a kind of album of mementoes: of grandfather's coat, grandmother's jacket, mother's cotton dress, father's uniform dating from his pilot days; the girls' red garters, the yellow military braids of the boys, the blue bathing costumes of the summer guests; pilot cloth and Manchester cotton and baize, wool and jute, specimens of many fashions and wardrobes, of the poor as well as the rich.

Pushed against one of the walls stood a large dresser made of white deal, with painted doors whose panels were wonderful little landscapes framed in ivy-shoots of inlaid bronze, depicting cornflower blue bays, banks grown over with rushes, sailing boats and trees of unknown species, indigenous to Paradise or the Car-

boniferous Period; a rough sea with waves as straight as the furrows in a potato field; a lighthouse which stood like a column on a cliff composed of stone steps; and all these things were represented with the simplicity and naiveté with which the crude eye of a child beholds the infinite wealth and variety of nature only fully apparent to a highly trained eye.

But it was just this old-fashioned simplicity which was to cure the tired brain come here to find rest in association with the past. The worn-out clockwork was to remain unwound, the spring relaxed, till such time as the lost energy should be restored. Association with the lower classes, who were not competitors in the struggle for supremacy, but involuntarily reminded the upper classes daily and hourly of their hard-earned point of vantage, should relax the tension, and lull the ambitious heart with the thought that there were stages which it had long left behind.

Axel Borg had prepared the senses of the visitors, so that they should be able to see and feel all this. The two ladies consequently never wearied of reiterating their satisfaction with their new quarters, and became so absorbed in their investigations that neither of them noticed the quiet withdrawal of their escort.

In the afternoon Axel Borg sat at his window and watched his new neighbours settling down in their cottage. As his eyes followed their graceful, irregular movements, he seemed to hear music. The same undulations which the successive repetition of a single note produces on the drum of the ear and transmits to the nervous system, the same gentle vibrations were set in motion now by the eye, and made to sound through the white strings which are stretched from the scroll of the cranium across the sounding board of the chest, and carry the trembling pulses to the very depth of the soul. A feeling of general well-being flowed through him as he watched the rounded movements of those delicate white hands, taking odds and ends from the portmanteaus and depositing them on table and chairs, noticed the elastic rise and fall of hips and shoulders, unappreciable, perhaps, to a coarser eye. There was never a straight line as the girl glided through the room, no sharp corners as she turned round, no angles as she stooped down.

He was so fascinated by the spectacle that a slight noise in the loft, the creaking of the stairs and the turning of a key in the lock completely escaped his notice for the moment.

He was gazing at the girl whose beauty, with the exception of one point, seemed to him to have reached absolute perfection. He

wanted to accustom his eye to the one defect, so as not to see it any longer. Her chin was a little too large, indicating a lower jaw which was unnecessarily well developed for a human being who no longer seized, held and tore raw flesh. Whenever he saw her profile, his imagination involuntarily constructed from it the physiognomy of a witch, which doubtless was the fate of the lovely face when, in old age, the teeth would drop out, the lips fall in, forming an obtuse angle, and the nose sink down to meet the protruding chin. He must force himself to overcome this haunting suggestion of a beast of prey; his eyes were rivetted on her features: he re-constructed them in imagination and forced himself to look at her face in its entirety.

All of a sudden he heard foot-steps and wild screams in the street before the house. Oeman's wife and a horde of frantic women were triumphantly carrying the recovered draw net down to the drying poles.

It was a slap in his face; he put on his hat and went downstairs to look for the inspector; he would call on him, the paid servant of the Government, for the assistance which he was entitled to claim.

The inspector was sitting at the table, drinking coffee, with his arm, as usual, round his sister-in-law, for Vestman was away, fish-



ing. As the superintendent entered the room, he released her; fear of being betrayed made him more than ordinarily willing to do the superintendent's bidding. He immediately put on his hat with its official striped border and went out. With a sudden desire to play the part of the upright man, he rushed at the women and seized the net.

'You dirty sluts, don't you know that it means hard labour for you to break the seal of the crown?' he shouted.

The chorus of women replied by pouring abuse on the heads of superintendent and inspector alike. They cared the devil for the seal of the crown; both gentlemen ought to be in prison themselves.

The inspector lost his temper and called to a customs official to fetch the police.

At the word 'police' the fisherfolk came out of their hovels like ants out of an ant-heap at the intrusion of a foreign body.

They seemed prepared to take the women's part and shouted threats and insults. Axel Borg considered that it was time for him to interfere personally, so as to avoid the semblance of being under the protection of a subordinate. He went up to the crowd and asked them what they wanted.

When he received no reply, he turned to the women :

'As I have already told you,' he said sternly, 'Parliament, that is to say the delegates elected by you, has decided for the good of your children and your children's children to protect the fishing industry by the prohibition of such nets and tackle as will ruin the industry without any material advantage to you. You have had three years to use up all the old nets. But as you have manufactured new ones, entirely disregarding the law, I have been compelled to seize the illegal tackle in the name of the King. Nevertheless, in defiance of the law of the land, you have broken the seal of the crown; the punishment for this offence is hard labour. But I will be lenient with you if you will promise to submit and obey. Therefore I ask you once more: Are you going to give up that net?'

The only reply was fresh shouts of abuse.

'Very well,' concluded the superintendent, 'as I am no policeman, and you are in the majority, I hereby request the inspector to send to the police station for assistance, and at the same time for a warrant of apprehension for Mrs Oeman.'

As he uttered the last words, two soft, warm hands seized his right hand; two large, child-like eyes gazed into his, and he heard a voice pleading in the accents of a mother who is pleading for the life of her child.

'For Heaven's sake, have mercy on the unhappy woman and don't be hard on her,' begged the girl who had come out of the house at the commencement of the scene.

Axel Borg tried to release himself and turned away from the pleading eyes whose gaze he was unable to bear; but he felt the pressure on his hand tighten, felt it pressed against a soft bosom. He heard a voice beseeching him in gentle, imploring accents. Completely overcome, he whispered :

'Let me go, I will let the matter drop.'

The girl loosened her hold. Axel Borg, his plan made in half a second, took the inspector by the arm and led him into the custom-house, as if he intended to give him some directions. When they had reached the door, the superintendent said shortly and decisively, as if he had just made up his mind :

'I'll write to the Authorities myself. In the meantime, thank you for your assistance.'

And with these words he went upstairs to his room.

When he was alone and had time to collect his thoughts, he was bound to admit that the action he had taken was prompted by base motives. His sexual instinct had mastered him to such a degree that he had allowed himself to be beguiled into the commission of an illegal action. There could be no question of

pity; the Oemans were comparatively well off; they possessed a house, a fishing ground, boats and tackle worth many hundred crowns, seal rookeries and bird cliffs; in addition they had a certain amount of capital, and owned some land which they were in the habit of letting. He completely rejected the equally wrong conception that a woman had got the better of him; he had no delusions about himself, and knew very well that he had been conquered by his own instincts or the desire to gain something from this girl. Doubtless, he had lost the respect of the natives; his official position was shaken; henceforth the island would contain no old woman, no young lad, who would not look down upon him. This, of course, was a fact which need not trouble him; whether he had authority over these rustics or not, was a matter of indifference. It was far worse that the girl, who in the short time had become necessary to his happiness, would from the very outset harbour the conviction that once, at least, she had been the stronger of the two; in a future union the equilibrium would be disturbed.

He had frequently been attracted by women, and had had more than one love affair, but he was so firmly convinced that man was superior to the intermediary form between man and child, called woman, that he had always found

it impossible to hold back his opinion for any length of time, and therefore his love affairs had invariably been short-lived. He desired to be loved by a woman who would look up to him as the stronger; he must be the idol, not the worshipper; he must be the trunk on which the weak branch was grafted. But he lived in an age of mental epidemics when megalomania was rampant among women. Degenerate, sickly men and political dullards who required the vote of the masses were to blame for it. Therefore he had remained a solitary man. He was well aware that in love a man must give, must allow himself to be duped; that the only way on which to approach a woman was on all fours. He had crawled at times and as long as he had done so, all had been well; but as soon as he had risen to his feet, the end had come; and always with a flood of accusations that he had been false, that his love had been a lie, and other charges of a similar nature.

In addition to this he, who held within his grasp the loftiest spiritual pleasures, who felt himself to be an exception among men, had no very strong desire for love in its lower aspects; he had never striven to become the supporter of a parasite; never longed to beget competitors. His strong individuality had rebelled against the thought of becoming a

woman's means for propagating her kind, a part played by nearly all the men of his generation.

But in spite of everything he was now again on the horns of a dilemma; in order to draw the beloved woman up to him, he himself must adopt woman's ways and characteristics. He was unable to dissemble or outwardly express what he did not feel, but he possessed a remarkable power of adapting himself to his environment, of putting himself into the place of others. And as the characteristics, the points of view he encountered in other people were nothing but so many stages through which he himself had passed, all he had to do was to draw on his memory and experience, let go the handle and reduce the tension. He had always taken pleasure in women's society. It was a recreation to him and an amusement, in the same way as the society of children is rejuvenating and invigorating, unless through over-abundance it degenerates into a strain.

He had felt the firm resolve to make this particular woman his wife growing in him. But although he was a scientist and knew that man was a mammal, he was fully aware that human love, like everything else, had undergone evolution and had in its revolutionary process absorbed spiritual qualities without losing its sensuous foundation. He knew

exactly how much unhealthy adoration had crept into the conception of love with the reaction of Christianity against the wholly bestial. He loathed the prudery which concealed that which must not be shown; at the same time he denied that bodily intercourse was the end and aim of matrimony. He longed for a complete union of body and soul, in which he, as the stronger acid, would neutralise the passive base without forming, as in chemistry, a new substance, but merely creating a superfluity of free acid which would always give the amalgamation its character and be ready to counteract any attempt at liberation by the base. For human love was no chemical amalgamation but a spiritual and **organic** union, resembling the former to a certain extent but being by no means the same thing. He consequently expected no increase of his ego, no added strength, but only a heightening of his joy of life. Instead of wanting a support, he offered himself as such, so that he might fathom his own powers and experience the joy of gauging his strength; that he might spend his soul with prodigal hands and yet neither grow weaker nor impoverish himself.

While he was thus indulging in his reverie, his glances again strayed through the window. They fell at once on her whom he sought.

The girl was standing outside the porch of Oeman's cottage, shaking hands with men and women, gently stroking the heads of children, and apparently overwhelmed by the emotion which called forth such great public sympathy.

'What an extraordinary display of sympathy with criminals!' thought Borg. 'What love for the poor in spirit! And how well they understand each other's instincts, which they call feelings, so that they may publicly flaunt them; these feelings which they consider superior to clear, mature thought.'

The whole scene was such a web of nonsense that it seemed impossible to comprehend it. It clearly proved the chaotic condition produced in the brains and spinal cords by the first feeble efforts to think.

There she stood, who had beguiled him into an offence against the law, allowing herself to be worshipped as an angel, regardless of the fact that if his offence was really a beautiful action from her point of view, then the thanks were surely due to him who had shown mercy instead of punishing the offenders. The crowd, however, were evidently of a different opinion; they well knew that his leniency was not aroused by a feeling of good will towards them, but that he had acted under the girl's influence; either from courtesy or in the hope of winning her love. Still, the underlying



reason for her conduct might, in this instance, be a desire for popularity, a wish to win the sympathy of the crowd, to be praised and cheered. The rabble on this forsaken skerry played the same part as the assembly in a ball room, the passers-by in the street or market place. She had seduced him by a touch, innocent or calculated, probably both, to commit a wrong for which she was now being worshipped.

Nevertheless he was obsessed by the thought that he must win her, and he realised that he might as well drop his belated musings. He recognised in a flash that through her mediumship his ideas and plans might filter down to the crowd; that through her he might move the masses, compel them to accept his benefits, make them his henchmen. He could then smile as a god at their foolish boasting that they themselves were the architects of their fortunes, while they were but pregnant with his plans, his thoughts. They should eat the lees of his splendid brewage, but their lips should never touch his strong mead! What did he care whether or not these forsaken skerries supported a half-starved, superfluous race of men! What compassion could he feel for his natural enemies, who represented the inert masses which had lain on his life like a pall, hindering his growth! They had no

pity for each other, and they persecuted, with the hatred of wild beasts, benefactors, who revenged themselves by the bestowal of fresh benefits.

This should be his great and strong felicity : to be overlooked, to be taken for a fool, and yet to guide the destiny of these men who believed that they had beaten him, bound him hand and foot, cut off all his connexions. He would strike the fools with blindness, rob them of their sight, so that they should imagine themselves his masters and him their servant.

A knock at the door interrupted his thoughts just as they were culminating in a strong resolve. The inspector entered with an invitation from the ladies to a cup of tea.

Borg thanked him and sent a message that he would come.

After having dressed and decided what to say and what to leave unsaid, he went across to Oeman's cottage.

He met Miss Marie in the porch; she seized his hands and pressed them with exaggerated warmth.

'How can I thank you for all your kindness to that poor woman?' she said in a voice trembling with emotion. 'It was noble of you, it was great!'

'It was nothing of the kind,' answered Borg, unhesitatingly. 'It was a bad action on my

part, which I regret, and which I only committed to please you.'

'You are libelling yourself from sheer politeness; I should be far more pleased with a little candour,' replied the girl, as her mother joined them.

'Oh! You're a good boy,' interrupted the mother with unshakable conviction, inviting Borg into the big room where tea was served.

Borg entered without replying. He saw at a glance that the simple furniture of the fisherman's cottage had been crossed with the shabby fragments of a luxurious town house. Alabaster vases, yellow with age, stood on the chest of drawers, photographs were placed between the flowers on the window sill, an easy chair, covered with flowered chintz and studded with brass nails, filled a corner near the fireplace; a few books were arranged on a little table round a lamp.

The arrangement, which had been carried out with scrupulous mathematical exactitude and regularity, was pretty enough, but everything was just a little crooked, a little lopsided, although it was meant to be straight. The tea-set of old Dresden china, with a gold edge and red initials, was cracked here and there, and the lid of the tea pot was rivetted.

Borg looked at the portrait of the late husband and father without daring to ask what

position he had occupied; he could tell, however, that he had been in the civil service, and that his family was in reduced circumstances.

They talked of scenery and surroundings, passed on to the event of the day and finally discussed the character of the natives. Axel Borg was not long in finding out that the ladies took a great interest in other people's business, and felt an almost morbid solicitude for the welfare of the lower classes. He soon noticed, however, that his candid opinions irritated them, and as it was not to his advantage to offend them by pressing his views, he gave in to them and followed the course of least resistance. Every now and then his inmost consciousness rebelled against one or other of their statements, and he longed to venture an explanation, or even contradict them; but immediately it was as if gentle hands closed his lips, soft arms slipped round his neck and choked the words before he could utter them. Moreover, the views of his hostesses were so deeply rooted, they were so convinced of the truth of all they said, that they only smiled indulgently whenever he betrayed a doubt in any of their principles.

But as soon as they were launched on a discussion of the moral and spiritual state of the colony, Axel Borg woke up. He described with some warmth the drunken brawl, the

brutal scenes of the morning, deplored the want of enlightenment and concluded by telling them stories which proved that the natives were still under the sway of almost complete paganism. He related to them how the fishermen sacrificed on stones, loaded their guns with the lead stolen from church windows; talked of Thor's hammer when the thunder was rolling, of Wotan's wild chase when the geese returned in the spring; how in the inner islands of the archipelago they allowed the crows to work havoc among the poultry for fear of unknown avengers if they disturbed their nests.

'But you can't blame them,' interrupted the elder of the two ladies, 'it's not their fault! They would be different if the way to church were not so far!'

The idea had never struck Borg, but now he saw in a flash the potentiality of a powerful ally. Developing the thought germ which was sown in his heart in the morning as he watched divine service on board the steamer, he called out enthusiastically:

'But a mission house would be cheap enough! Supposing I wrote to the Government about it!'

The ladies took up the matter with ardour; they agreed to write to the Foundation and various societies; suggested getting up a

bazaar, but almost immediately abandoned the idea, because there was nobody on the island who could dance.

Borg disposed of all difficulties by offering to advance the money and set to the building, which could be bought ready-made at a factory, if the ladies would undertake to find a lay preacher. 'But,' he added, 'it will have to be a zealous man, one who is ready to attack the people, because in a case like this lukewarmness is out of place.'

The ladies made one or two objections; they were in favour of more gentle and loving means; but Axel Borg proved that fear was the foundation on which civilisation must be built; love might come in later on.

A lofty mutual interest forged their souls together, while they warmed their hearts at the fire of a great love. They talked themselves into an overflowing compassion with all things created. They pressed each other's hands and parted with blessings and rejoicings that fate had brought together three good people who would work in harmony for the welfare of humanity.

As Borg, a few minutes later, stepped out of the porch, he shook himself as if he wanted to shake himself free from dust. He had the sensation which a visit to a mill always gave him : a certain feeling of pleasure at the sight

## BY THE OPEN SEA

the mellow, creamy tint of the flour which covered iron, wood, linen and glass, effacing all differences. He had the same vague, voluptuous feeling when he touched the locks, banisters, and sacks of flour. At the same time he found it difficult to breathe; he coughed and pulled out his handkerchief.

And yet he had spent a pleasant evening. He had basked in the warmth emanating from the mother and falling like dew on the barren thoughts; he had revelled in the atmosphere of childlike simplicity radiating from the girl and rejuvenating him; her childish faith in what had been the ideal of his youthful days : to lift up the fallen, to care for the cripples, to strengthen the sick and the weak.

He had learned since that it was contrary to promoting the happiness and improvement of the race; he hated it instinctively, because everything that was strong, every sign of originality, was mercilessly persecuted by the incapable. Was he now to form an alliance with it against himself? Was he to work at his own undoing, lower his standard, pretend sympathy for the arch-enemy, pay his opponents' war expenses? The thought of the enjoyment which these trials of strength would yield him, intoxicated him. He turned towards the shore to come to himself again in the great solitude.

As he was walking along in the still, warm summer night across the sands in which he could trace his own foot-steps of a few days ago; where every stone and every plant was known to him, he noticed a great change. Nothing was the same; everything was transformed. His impressions were quite different to those he had had on the previous day. Something new had come into his life. He could no longer call up within himself, pitted against nature or humanity, the feeling of absolute loneliness, for somebody was standing behind him, by the side of him. His isolation was a thing of the past. He was chained to this petty, every-day life; threads had been spun round his soul; consideration for others was beginning to fetter his thoughts; a cowardly fear of thinking on lines different to those of his friends, clutched him.

He dared not build up his happiness on an insecure foundation, for fear that when he had reached the roof, the whole building would totter and fall to the ground. Then the fall would be deeper, the pain more bitter! And yet he had to do it, if he wanted to call her his own; and to make her his wife he was resolved with the full strength of manhood which can move mountains.

Lift her up to him? How could that be done? He could not make a man of her, could



not deliver her from the untameable instincts which she owed to her sex; he could not give her his own education which had taken thirty years, the evolutionary training he had undergone, the experience he had bought, the studies he had pursued.

He must stoop down to her, then. But the thought of this stooping tormented him as the greatest possible evil, appeared to him as degeneration, a coming down in the world, a beginning again at the beginning; an impossible contingency. The only remaining alternative was the doubling of his personality, a splitting of himself in two, thereby creating a being which she could understand and appreciate; he must play the lover outwitted, admire her inferiority, act his part as she would like him to act it. And he must live the other half of his life silently and in secrecy; sleep always with one eye open.

He had unconsciously climbed the cliff. He could see lights in the fishing village and hear wild screams; shouts of triumph over the beaten foe, whose wish it had been to raise their children and children's children from poverty, and put new pleasures within their reach. All of a sudden the longing awoke in him again to see these savages tamed, these worshippers of Tor bend their knee before the white Christ, the giants overcome by the gentle

Aesir. The barbarian must pass through Christianity as through purgatory, must learn to reverence the power of the spirit in a weak frame. These Huns and Goths must pass through their Middle-Ages before they could reach the Renaissance of thought and the Revolution of action.

Here, on the highest point of the skerry the chapel should be built, should raise its tiny tower above look-out and flag-staff and be a greeting to the passing sailors, in memory of . . .

His thought snapped; he pondered. A smile flitted across his pale face as he stooped down and picked up four pieces of gneiss, marking with them a rectangle from east to west, after having taken thirty steps in length and twenty in breadth.

What a splendid landmark for a seafaring man! he mused, as he slowly descended the cliff and walked home.

## CHAPTER VIII

THE Superintendent of Fisheries shut himself up for two days to work. As he went out for a walk on the third morning, chance threw him into the way of the old lady. She looked distressed, and when Borg enquired after her daughter, she told him that the girl was not at all well.

'It's want of occupation,' he said, merely in order to say something.

'There's nothing to be done in this wilderness,' sighed the distressed mother.

'Miss Marie should go out fishing and sailing, and stir about a little,' he prescribed, thoughtlessly.

'Oh! that's all very well,' agreed the mother, 'but poor Marie can't go by herself.'

The reply to this was obvious.

'I shall be very pleased to be of service,' he said, 'if the ladies will put up with my company.'

The delighted mother accepted the offer and hurried off to tell Marie to get ready.

Axel Borg went on to the harbour to see to

the boat. Gradually he slackened his footsteps, as if some unseen pressure were pushing him down a slope faster than he intended to go. He was loath to be set in motion by some outside agency before he had had time to think. He longed to resist, but was unable to do so. It was too late now, therefore he allowed himself to drift, conscious that he could always take the helm and steer whither he would.

He had loisted the foresail, unshipped the tiller and loosened the painter, so as to be able to let it go at a moment's notice, when Marie and her mother appeared on the shore. The girl was wearing a navy-blue dress, trimmed with white braid; her blue woollen tam-o'-shanter suited her to perfection and gave her face an expression of boyish impudence, very different from the angelic air of a few days ago.

When the usual civilities had been exchanged, Borg prepared to help the ladies into the boat. The girl took his proffered hand and jumped lightly on board, where Borg placed her at the helm. But when he held out his hand to the mother, she declared she could not come, as she had to look after the dinner.

This surprise was too sudden, and again Borg felt prompted to resist the gentle force which pushed him whither he did not wish to go. But fear of being considered ill-mannered held him back. He regretted that they would

be deprived of the old lady's pleasant company, let go the painter, directed Marie to shift the helm, put the mainsheet into her hand and hoisted the sail.

'But I don't know how to sail a boat,' exclaimed the girl, 'I've never held a tiller in my life !'

'There's not the slightest difficulty about it,' answered Borg, sitting down before her and assisting her in her manoeuvring, 'do as I tell you and you'll make a perfect sailor.'

A faint breeze was blowing and the boat glided out of the harbour before a side wind.

Borg held the fore-sheet and gave instructions to the pretty helmswoman, seizing her wrist every now and then and pressing the tiller against the wind, until they had left the harbour behind them, were well on the way and stood on a direct tack to the Skerries.

The sense of responsibility, the exertion, the feeling that she guided the vessel which carried both their lives, stirred up latent powers in the soft, yielding figure; her eyes, carefully watching the sails, sparkled with courage and self-confidence when she realised that the boat obeyed the slightest pressure of her hand.

Whenever she made a mistake, he corrected her with a few gentle words, encouraged her by praising her close attention, and removed

all difficulties by pretending that the whole proceeding was a mere matter of course.

She was radiant with happiness and began to speak of the past, of her thirty-four years; she told him that she had believed that life and joy were over for her; but that she felt young again; that she had always dreamed of an active life, a man's life, so that she might devote all her energy to mankind. She knew that being a woman meant being a pariah . . .

Borg listened to all these open secrets, the formulae of a senseless striving to equalise what nature, purposely, had made as unlike as possible to save humanity unnecessary labour.

But to answer them now seemed to him a waste of time and energy. He therefore continued acting his part as a privileged listener, and let her voice the unhealthy fancies which the wind would blow away. Instead of taking the knife and cutting the confused skein of her thoughts, he would simply ignore its existence. By stirring up impressions which he would purposely produce, he would unravel the old jumble and use it as a foundation on the spools where he would wind the good rich yarn of his own spinning.

A scheme flashed into his mind which would enable him to make her pass within a few

hours through a series of sensations, coming from outside in her opinion, by using, without her being aware of it, the living pictures of the Skerries as a means of instruction. In this way he would silently spread the net of his soul over her soul, and tune its strings so that they should be in harmony with the music of his own.

With a movement of his head he indicated that she should allow the boat to drift. He slackened the sheet, the boat had dropped the land and gently plashed across the open surface. The wide horizon, the infinite sea of light, void of all objects, threw a radiance on the girl's beautiful face; her small features seemed to grow, her almost invisible lines were smoothed out, her whole expression was one of delivery from every-day cares and petty thoughts. The eye which, at a single glance, could take in a comparatively large part of the globe, had lost the grasp of small things; the slender figure seemed to expand and feel its power. But when the huge rollers lifted and dropped the boat in powerful rhythms, he could see a breath of fear dimming her ecstasy and trying to hinder the flight of her thoughts.

Borg noticed that the magnificent spectacle had made an impression, and resolved to put a text to the soft music of her emotion, guide her vague gropings on to the great path. He

would loosen the husks of the swelling seed-buds, so that the seed could grow.

'The power of the planet is manifesting itself,' he mused aloud. 'Earth, the everyday, dull, dusty earth, has become a star. Do we not win Heaven as soon as we realise that the contrast between Heaven and Earth is a mere illusion? That they are as much one as a whole and the part of a whole? Do you not feel that instead of shrinking you grow when you have succeeded in outwitting the wind and compelled it to carry you to the right when it blew to the left? Are you not conscious of the splendid power dwelling within you, when you ride on the crest of the wave which, with the pressure of a thousand pounds, would fling you into the abyss? He who is said to have created the wings of a bird, and required fifty thousand years to make a flyer out of a crawler, was less intelligent than he who first hoisted a piece of cloth on the top of a pole, and so, in one second, invented navigation. Is it wonderful, therefore, that man, intellectual man, created God in his image, by deducing a still more intellectual spirit?'

The girl had listened to him attentively, steadfastly regarding his face, as if she had turned to a fire to warm herself. The unusual words seemed to have made a deep impression on her, and to act like leaven.



Lulled by the gentle, persuasive accents, she accepted without hesitation the new points of view which he had given her on human origin and destiny, a subject which up to now had been to her like a stony and lifeless desert. Without comprehending that her own religious convictions were being buried before they were dead, she accepted the new theories, piling them up on the old doctrine.

'You talk as I never heard anybody talking before,' she said dreamily, 'go on!'

He was silent and with a quick movement changed the course of the boat.

They were approaching the skerry with the gloomy formation of vulcanite, the Black-Cliff, as it was called. The black, sparkling diorite with the ghastly sea-mark, 'The White Mare', looked even more lowering in the sunshine, which vainly tried to blend the two extremes, black and white.

The girl's face clouded over, her features seemed to shrink, she frowned and drew down her eye-brows, as if she wanted to shut out the depressing sight. A little jerk of the helm indicated that she meant to stand off; but he kept the boat to her course, and the force of the wind shot her straight into the gully between the black cliffs, from whence the sobbing seas sucked her slowly forward.

Silence fell in the boat. Borg did not

attempt to speculate on the melancholy memories which the grim surroundings awakened in his companion; he confined himself to pointing out to her the bleached skeleton of a grebe which lay on the black rock.

The wind filled the sails again and carried the boat out of the gully into the open water.

They sailed past the cliff with the solitary mountain-ash and the water wagtail, and approached the Swordholm, where he had seen her for the first time.

There they landed and he led her along the same path on which he had come that Sunday morning; he made her receive the same impressions which he himself had received, and finally took her down to the flowering meadow and showed her, between the crab-apple trees, the place from where he had seen her for the first time.

This roused a mischievous mood in her, for the fact that he remembered these trifles seemed to prove that he was in love. She laughed when he told her that the first indication of her presence had been "a cough; in a spirit of playfulness she asked him to go back to the place and speak; then she would guess who it was.

He obeyed, scrambled down the cliff, hid behind the timber trees and began to bellow like a bull.

'Oh! but he can sing beautifully!' laughed the girl. 'I think he must be a Hottentot actor.'

Her childishness amused Borg who had not played with children for many years, and he went on acting the part. He came out from behind the trees on the grass plot, turned his coat inside out, hung his eye-glass over one ear and danced an improvised savage dance, accompanying it with a song which he had heard the Hottentots singing in the Jardin d'Acclimation.

The girl was surprised and delighted.

'Do you know,' she said, 'I like you ever so much better now that I know that you can drop the philosophic mask at any moment, and be a human being.'

'But do you prefer the Hottentot to the philosopher?' The words had escaped Borg almost against his will, and he immediately regretted having broken the spell. He broke a little branch off the timber tree, twisted it into a garland and handed it to the girl, whose spirits had sunk when she realised that she had made a stupid remark.

'Please decorate the victim, Miss Marie,' pleaded Borg. 'I wish I were a hundred bulls, to be sacrificed to you as a hecatomb.'

He bent his knee and the mollified beauty wound the garland round his brow. Then he ran down to the shore, the girl following him.

They did not stop until they reached the sandy beach.

'Shall we play ducks and drakes?' she suggested.

'Yes, let's!' he assented eagerly, choosing a flat stone.

They played for a little while until they grew hot.

'Let's bathe!' she burst out suddenly, as if she had been brooding over this thought until she could retain it no longer.

Borg did not know what to say; he wondered whether she was serious, whether she meant to keep on some of her clothes, or wanted him to go away.

'All right; bathe if you want to; I'll come back when you've had enough,' he stammered in the end.

'But won't you bathe?' asked the girl.

'No; I haven't got my bathing suit,' answered Borg, 'and, moreover, I never bathe in cold water.'

'Hahahaha!' It was a cold, disagreeable laugh from the girl's throat. 'Are you afraid of cold water?' she scoffed. 'Perhaps you can't swim?'

'My sensitive nerves can't stand the shock of the cold water. But if you are going to take a cold bath here, I will take a warm one on the northern headland.'

The girl had already taken off her laced boots.

'I hope you won't be able to see me from there?' she said, with a look of offended vanity and contempt.

'As long as you don't swim out too far,' replied Borg as he left her.

When he had reached the northern declivities of the islet, he selected a mountain-cleft protected from the north wind by a wall of rock, fifty yards high. The black, amphibolic gneiss had been polished by the waves till they had the appearance of agate. The slight corrugations of the surface looked like the muscles of the human body, and fitted like a bolster into the cavities of the bare foot. No breath of wind could come here, and the burning rays of the sun had scorched the black rock for the last six hours, so that the temperature of the air was several degrees above the temperature of the body, and the stones almost burned the naked feet.

He fetched an axe from the boat, cut off the driest heather, the most parched looking sand-oats, and made a roaring fire on the cliff while he undressed. When the fire had died down, he swept the rock clean like a baker's oven, poured, with a baling ladle, the crystal seawater on the heated surface and let the steam envelop his body. Then he sat down in one

of the arm-chairs which the sea had carved out of the rock, pulled his rug over him, drew his knees up to his chin, shut his eyes and seemed to fall asleep.

But he did not sleep: it was merely his method of winding himself up, as he called it, so as to allow his brain to rest for a few seconds and regain its elasticity. It was a strain on him to adapt himself to the less highly evolved mentality of others. The mechanism of his thoughts suffered from the contact with other brains, became restless and unreliable like a magnetic needle in the vicinity of iron. Whenever he wanted to clear his thoughts, or form an important decision, he took a warm bath to throw his soul into a state of harmonious stupor; he extinguished consciousness for a moment in a sort of semi-sleep, by thinking of nothing. This brought the material of observation which he had absorbed to a condition of liquefaction, and when he extinguished the fires and brought himself back to consciousness, the alloy was ready.

After he had let the sun warm him for a little while, he suddenly stood up, wide-awake, as after a night's unbroken rest. His thoughts were busy and a happy smile played over his features, as if he had solved a difficult problem

'She is thirty-four,' he thought, 'I had for-

gotten that under the influence of her youthful beauty. Hence this chaos of stages left behind, these fragments of parts which she has played in life, this crowd of changing reflections of the men she has tried to win, and to whom, at one time or another, she adapted herself. And she must have suffered shipwreck in a love affair quite recently. The man who kept all these soul fragments together abandoned her; the sack broke, and now everything is lying about; scattered like the lumber in a rag-picker's shop. She has shown samples of the pious romanticism of 1850, and has babbled of the salvation of humanity which was a favourite topic in the beginning of this century; she draws religious zeal from the joint voices of the dove and the pietist, utters cynicisms dating from the time of George Sand and the vragoes . . .'

His common-sense saved him from attempting to find the bottom in this sieve through which so many sou's had been strained; to waste time on the solution of a riddle which was no riddle. The only thing to do was to select from the heap of bones those which he could build up into a skeleton; this done, he must cover it with living flesh and breathe into it the breath of his spirit. But he would have to be careful and not let her guess his intention, for if she did guess it, she would never

permit it. She must never know how he regarded her, for it would only awaken hatred and resistance in her. He must grow subterraneously, as a root, and graft her on to him, then shoot up and show to the world the blossom which all eyes would admire.

The screaming of the sea-gulls suggested that she had swum out to sea. He hastily dressed.

When he had collected all his things, he carried up from the boat a little luncheon, which he spread out on the moss under a half-grown pine tree.

There were but a few dishes, served on the remnants of a collection of precious china, he had once started. The butter, golden as the yolk of an egg, was packed in a dish of saponite with a screw lid, and stood on ice heaped up in the fragment of a china pot of the time of Henry II; the biscuits lay on a perforated plate from Marienberg, and the anchovies on a saucer from Nevers.

A hearty dislike of the all-invading commonplace in art and literature had sent the owner in search of originality; he had shared the fate of many others and had been driven to luxuriousness in order to save his individuality from being ground down in the great flood of rubble stones. His finely developed senses could not merely seek beauty



in shape and colour, which so quickly lose their charm; he wanted to surround himself with associations, mementoes of events of world-wide importance. This fragment of a china pot of Henry the Second's time, made of creamy white clay, crusted over with red, black and gold, called up memories of the beautiful country of the Loire and its castles, built in the period of the Renaissance. Its decoration in the style of a book cover was reminiscent of the chatelaine Helena of Hengst and her librarian who, with the assistance of a potter, created a style, purely personal and yet coloured by the period of knighthood; that period when beauty was everything, and even the crafts willingly bowed down to art and science, fully realising the advantages of a spiritual order.

When, everything being ready, he regarded the work of his hands, it seemed to him that he had brought a fragment of culture into this semi-arctic desert. Anchovies from Brittany, chestnuts from Andalusia, caviare from the Volga, cheese from the Swiss Alps, sausage from Thuringia, biscuits from Great Britain and oranges from Asia Minor; a bottle of Chianti, covered with wickerwork, to be drunk out of stem glasses, bearing in gilt letters the name of Frederick I; all this formed a medley without a hint of the collector or the museum;

little splashes of colour here and there; flowers, pressed as keepsakes between the leaves of a book of travel instead of in a flower-press.

Now he heard the girl's voice calling to him from her bathing place. He shouted back.

A few moments afterwards she emerged from the undergrowth, straight, fresh and radiant with health and happiness. When she caught sight of the luncheon prepared by him, she raised her cap and made him a mock bow. Nevertheless he could see plainly that the elegance of his arrangements impressed her.

'You are a magician,' she said; 'allow me to do you homage.'

'Not for so little,' he replied.

'You are hinting at greater powers,' she laughed. 'But as for ruling the forces of nature, as you professed to be able to do a little while ago, let me counsel you to leave these things alone.' She spoke in superior, motherly accents.

'I never said anything so definite; I only mentioned that we have partly enslaved the forces of nature and partly obey them. Please notice the important little word *partly*. Furthermore, I said that it is within our power to alter the character of a landscape and the entire psychology of its inhabitants.'

'Very well, then; please transform this

terrible greystone scenery into an Italian landscape with marble villas and stone pines.'

'I'm no conjuror, but as you challenge me, I'll promise you to transform this wonderful green landscape, the like of which is not to be found in Europe, in three weeks from this day, into a tree-less, sun-scorched cauliflower scenery, such as you seem to admire. This shall be my birthday present to you.'

'Done! In three weeks! And if I lose?'

'Then I shall win—what?'

'That remains to be seen!'

'That remains to be seen! But will you do my work in the meantime?'

'What is your work? To lie on the sofa and smoke cigarettes?'

'Well, yes, if you can do my work from the sofa, as I can. But you can't. And I'll tell you why, and why I'm here on this skerry. But let me pour you out some wine first.'

He filled a glass with the dark red Chianti and handed it to the girl who drank it at a gulp.

'You know,' began Borg, 'my official task here in this village is to teach the people to fish.'

'And that will be a huge success! I heard you boasting that you never held a rod in your hand all your life.'

'Don't interrupt me—I'm not here to teach

them the art of angling. The fact is this : those laggards, conservative as the rabble always is . . .'

'What language !' interrupted the girl.

'Candid language ! However—these aborigines are undermining their position as fish-eating animals from sheer stupidity and conservatism. Therefore the State is compelled to put them under the care of trustees. The strömming,—bless the fish !—which forms the staple food of these autochthons, threatens to become extinct. This, of course, is a matter of perfect indifference to me ; whether a superfluous tribe of men contains a hundred fish-eaters more or less, has no bearing whatever on the great scheme of the Universe. But the Agricultural College desires them to remain alive, and therefore I am here to prevent them from catching their scant sustenance. Do you admit the logic of this ?'

'It's inhuman, but then you are made of the wood out of which hangmen are carved.'

'Therefore, acting on my own impulse, and without aspiring to the order of Vasa or any thanks whatever, I have discovered a new source of income for them which shall replace the old one.' Even if the strömming after half a life-time, when all the inhabitants of the skerries have emigrated, should swim about these waters in shoals, this industry is

threatened by a formidable competitor who, after an interval of a hundred years, is making its re-appearance. Do you know that the herring will come back to the West Coast in the autumn?’

‘No, it’s a long time since I heard from it.’

‘Well, anyhow, it’s a certainty. The consequence is that we must leave the strömming alone and fish for salmon.’

‘Salmon? In the depth of the sea?’

‘Yes! It must be there, although I’ve not yet seen it. *You* shall find it!’

‘But supposing it weren’t there.’

‘I’m telling you that it is! You need but catch the first few, and the salmon fishery is opened.’

‘How can you know that there is salmon when you’ve never seen a sign of it?’ scoffed the girl.

‘My investigations prove it. They are so complicated that I can’t explain them to you, now; I have conducted them partly from my boat, on the sea . . .’

‘Once!’

‘I work as fast as twenty others, thanks to my unusual knowledge, partly acquired by lying on the sofa and thinking, and partly, mostly perhaps, derived from books. But be that as it may, will you be an accessory in the undoing of the natives, first by the opening

up of the salmon industry and, secondly, by the influence of the mission-house which you seem to have forgotten?’

‘You’re a demon, a fiend!’ exclaimed the girl, half laughing, half uneasy.

Borg’s cynicism had been but a whimsical mood; but when he saw that it impressed her more than anything else, he went on acting the part.

‘Is it really true that you don’t believe in God?’ asked Miss Marie, with an expression as if she would abhor him in all eternity if he pleaded guilty.

‘Yes, quite true!’

‘And you want to be another Anscarius and introduce Christianity on the skerry?’

‘And the salmon fishery! Yes, I want to be a demoniacal Anscarius! But will you set the salmon lines and be blessed by the Auditors of the Riksdag?’

‘Yes, I will work for these people in whom I have faith; I will place my weak powers at the disposal of these oppressed ones; I will prove to you that you are a blasé, cynical, worn-out . . . but no, you aren’t; you are libelling yourself, you are really a good boy; I saw it on Sunday . . .’

She mentioned the good boy in the sure hope that he would swallow the bait and be her boy, good or bad. But he preferred the

rôle of the demon; a demon is a superior being and far more interesting than a boy, and therefore he stuck to the more effective part. True, he knew from experience that the easiest way of finding favour with a woman was to allow her to play the little mother, a part which permits a good deal of intimacy. But it was so hackneyed a game and might so easily have produced an ineradicable arrogance in her. She had better play the more grateful rôle of the redeemer. It contained nothing which would necessitate her domineering over him; she would have but the task of the Mother of God : to mediate. She would be placed as mediator between two equally strong powers.

But it was not easy to carry his idea into effect. A feeling of weariness at all this fuss, unavoidable if he wanted to win the game, led him to pretend that he must go and see whether the boat was safely moored, for the wind was getting up.

When he reached the shore he drew a deep breath, like a man who has been tried above his strength. He unbuttoned his waistcoat as if it were a coat of mail, let the fresh breeze cool his brow, and cast a look of longing at the open sea. He would have given much, now, to be able to be alone, to shake off the chaff which, at the contact with a lower intellect,

had fallen on his soul. He hated her at this moment, he would have liked to be free from her, master of himself, but it was too late! The cobwebs had wound round his face, soft, silky, invisible, and nothing could remove them.

When he turned round and saw her peeling a chestnut with her long fingers and sharp teeth, he thought of a mandrill which he had seen in a menagerie. A feeling of infinite compassion welled up in his heart, a breath of that melancholy which a happier individual feels on meeting a degraded fellow-creature. But he immediately remembered her delight when he had played the Hottentot, and his irritation returned. Finally he pulled himself together with an effort, and with the self-control of a man of the world made his way back to her. Merely to say something with which to cloak his feelings, he suggested that they should start on their homeward journey, as the breeze was freshening.

But she had seen the expression of weariness and absent-mindedness on his face.

'You are tired of me!' she said with a sharpness which completely repelled him for the moment. 'Let us go.'

As the expected compliment was not forthcoming, she continued with an emotion which might have been true or assumed :



'Forgive my unkind words! I am what life has made me, and I am ungrateful! There, now you know!'

She wiped her eyes, and with the practised care of the housewife gathered together the remnants of the feast and collected the china. Tying the tablecloth round her waist like an apron, she prepared to carry the dirty crockery down to the shore and wash it. He tried to take it from her, prompted by an intense dislike of seeing her do the work of a menial. He hated her to wait on him; he wanted to raise her on a pedestal, while she should look up to him who had given her power over him.

In their playful quarrel as to who should wait on the other, the girl dropped the crockery. She gave a scream; but when she looked at the pieces, her face cleared.

'Thank goodness, they're only old things! But I was frightened!'

He suppressed a petty thought of the loss, putting himself into the place of her who was to blame for the disaster. Glad that his conflicting moods had come to a noisy end, he played ducks and drakes with the pieces, and closed the embarrassing situation with a jest:

'We needn't wash up now!'

And he helped her into the boat which, to the accompaniment of the plashing of the growing seas, was tugging at the rope.

## CHAPTER IX

A SUNNY summer morning found the Superintendent of Fisheries and his pupil sitting in the wooden pavilion which he had had put up on the highest ridge of the skerry, close to the recently laid foundation stone of the mission house.

In the harbour below lay a schooner, discharging the ready-made parts of the building. The pieces were carried straight to their places and put together by the foreman and his gang. The island had therefore been for some time the scene of unusual activity. There had been a few fights between the fishermen and the labourers from the town, because the latter treated the former with a good deal of insolence. The immediate result was a number of feasts of reconciliation, which again led to more drunkenness and fresh brawls, and even to offences against morality and the right of property.

The Superintendent of Fisheries and the old lady had had moments in which they regretted having meddled with the spiritual condition of the natives, since the first fruits of their

attempted interposition were so little encouraging.

Moreover, the nightly scenes, the singing, shouting, and quarreling disturbed the ladies in their work and their rest, and so defeated the purpose which had brought them to the skerry. The Superintendent had lost his prestige on that fatal Sunday on which he had given way to the crowd, and was powerless to re-establish order. Miss Marie was more fortunate; her liveliness, a kind word to the people now and again, were frequently instrumental in calming the storm.

As she was unwilling to ascribe this success to her beauty and charm of manner, she jumped to the conclusion that she possessed more strength and intelligence than was really the case; and she became so convinced that she really was endowed with unusual mental qualities that even now, sitting as a pupil by the side of her preceptor, listening to his arguments as if they were nothing new to her, she was far more bent on improving and explaining his facts by the interpolation of remarks, more hypercritical than subtle as a rule, than on attempting to comprehend and absorb them.

Her mother was sitting by her side, quietly embroidering a cover for the pulpit of the new mission house, and whenever the girl by a foolish question succeeded in reducing her

preceptor to silence, she looked up startled, taken aback by her daughter's penetrating intelligence and vast knowledge.

'Don't you see, Miss Marie,' said Axel Borg, who still cherished the hope of being able to improve her mind, 'the uncultured eye is inclined to receive simple impressions; the undeveloped ear to hear simple sounds. You see nothing but grey stone all around, just as the artists and the poets do. That accounts for the monotony of their paintings and descriptions; that's why they find the skerries so dull. But just look at this geological map of the country, just look at the landscape. We are sitting on a formation of red gneiss. Look at this fragment of stone which you call grey-stone; notice the rich variety of black mica, white quartz and pink felspar of which it is composed.'

He had taken a specimen from a heap of stones which the excavators had blasted off the rock and piled up at the foot of the building.

'And look at this one here! It's called eurite. Look at the delicate tints, ranging from salmon-pink to flint-blue. And here you have white marble or primitive lime.'

'Do these rocks contain marble?' asked the pupil, her attention arrested by the name of this stone of luxury.

'Oh! yes, plenty, although it looks grey, without being grey. If you examine it more closely, you will find a marvellous wealth of colour in the lichen. A gradation of the most delicate shades from the deepest lamp-black to the brightest gold . . . Look more carefully at the skerries which are now fully illuminated by the sun, and you will see that the cliffs vary in colour. The natives, who are very observant, have given them names according to their hues, which they realised unconsciously. Don't you see that the Black Cliff is blacker than the rest, because it consists of the dark hornblende; that the Red Reef is red because it is formed of red gneiss; the White Skerry of smoothly polished eurite . . . Isn't it better to know *why* it is so, than simply to know *that* it is so? And isn't it still less satisfactory to see nothing but a monotonous grey, as the artists do who paint all the skerries in a mixture of black and white? Listen, now, to the rushing of the waves, as the poets summarily call this symphony of sounds. Close your eyes for a few moments, then you will hear better, while I dissect this harmony into single notes. First you hear a rushing, similar to the noise in an engine room or a great town; this is caused by the mutual contact of the huge masses of water. Next you hear a hissing sound; this is produced by

the smaller, lighter particles which are being lashed into foam; now you hear a scraping of the wave on the sand; now a clatter as if a cartloadful of gravel were being overturned: those are the small stones which the sea throws out; then a deep, hollow roar: it is the wave driving the air before it and pressing it into a cavity, and last of all a rolling as of distant thunder: those are the great boulders rolling about on the shingly ground.'

'But this is breaking up nature!' exclaimed the girl.

'No! it's being familiar with it! To me knowledge is rest. It delivers me from the poet's only half-concealed fear of the unknown, which is nothing but a memory of the groping of the savage, at a time when humanity craved for the explanation of natural phenomena, but could not find it in a hurry and therefore, for the want of anything better, substituted fables of mermaids and giants. But now, let us talk of the fishing industry which it is our task to revive; let's leave the salmon out of the question for a time and try new methods with the strömming. In two months the height of the fishing season will be here, and if I am not very much mistaken, it will be a failure this autumn.'

'How can you predict that from your sofa?' asked the girl, more critically than curiously.

'I predict it because I have seen—from my sofa—how in the spring the drift ice has scraped off all the sea-weed and algae in which the strömming lays its eggs. I predict it because the little crab-like animals, never mind what they are called, on which the strömming feeds, stayed away from the banks after the sea-weed had been scraped off. What's to be done therefore? An effort must be made to catch it in the deep waters. If the fish do not come to us, we must go to the fish. We must make a trial with drift nets which float in the wake of a drifting boat. That's simple enough.'

'A grand idea!' exclaimed Miss Marie.

'It's an old method,' objected Borg, 'not my invention by any means. But, being intelligent beings, we must cover our retreat. If we catch strömming and don't get a fair price for it because the herring is caught again on the West Coast, we must have another iron in the fire.'

'The salmon!'

'Yes, the salmon, which I am sure is here, although, as I said, I have not yet seen it.'

'We got so far last time. But now tell me how you can possibly know that?'

'I will cut the matter short and tell you in a few words why I am so certain. The salmon migrates like other migratory birds.'

'Is the salmon a bird, then?'

'Yes, certainly, a genuine migratory bird. It is at home in the rivers of Norrland. It is found, occasionally, in draw nets in the Northern Archipelago, is caught off Gotland and on the whole route to the south; therefore it must pass these skerries. Now it will be *your* task to find it with floating long lines. Would you care to be my assistant and draw a salary?'

The last proposal was very sudden, but it was calculated and did not miss its effect.

'I'm to earn money, Mama,' exclaimed Miss Marie, trying to hide her genuine pleasure behind a show of amusement. 'But,' she added, 'what are you going to do?'

'I shall lie on my sofa and, moreover, am I not under contract to *break up nature* for you?'

'What are you going to do?' asked the mother, unwilling to trust her ears.

'I have promised Miss Marie to make an Italian landscape for her,' answered Borg. 'I must be off now, and make a rough sketch of it.'

With these words he rose, bowed courteously and went down to the strand.

'He's a strange man,' said the mother, as she watched Borg disappearing in the distance.

'A very original man anyhow,' answered the daughter. 'But I don't believe that he's



quite right in his head. He seems to have principles, though, and on the whole I believe he means well. What do you think of him?’

‘Give me my ball of wool, child,’ answered the mother.

‘Do say something—tell me whether you like him or not,’ pleaded the girl.

The mother’s reply was a melancholy, half-resigned glance which clearly implied that she did not know.

In the meantime Borg had reached the harbour, unmoored his boat, and rowed out to the skerries.

They had had a whole month of summer heat, so that the air was very hot. But from the north, where an unusually hard winter had produced ground ice, came huge floes of drift ice, floating to the south and cooling the water to such a degree that the lower layers of air retained a greater density than the upper ones. Refraction altered the appearance of the skerries and during the last few days had caused the most magnificent mirages.

These phenomena had provoked lengthy discussions between the superintendent and the ladies. Finally the fishermen were appealed to as umpires; they were considered competent to give a decision because they were accustomed to these sights from their earliest infancy. One morning when, through refrac-

tion, the rosy gneiss rocks appeared much higher than they were in reality, and the varying density of the aerial layers made them look like the cliffs of Normandy, Miss Marie advanced a theory that what they saw were actually those calcareous rocks, reflected here, in the Baltic, in accordance with a still unexplained natural law. On the same occasion the white spray of the waves between the boulders had been so enlarged and magnified that it really resembled a flotilla of Norman vessels cruising off the Falaises.

Borg had unsuccessfully tried to explain the mirage in the only correct, scientific way, and thereby rob it of its supernatural flavour. The people were inclined to see in the phenomenon a prophecy of coming misfortune; they were even weak enough to allow their superstition to paralyse their energies : Borg clearly saw that if he wanted to bring his explanation home to the natives, he must first appear to them in the character of a magician; but he was resolved to rid his performance later on of every supernatural feature and show them exactly how he had worked his conjuring tricks.

He had asked the credulous whether, if they were to see the mirage of an Italian landscape, they would believe that what they saw was actually a reflection of Italy? As the reply

had been in the affirmative, he had made up his mind to kill two birds with one stone, and by a few alterations produce the southern landscape which he had promised Miss Marie as a birthday present. It should be the next mirage, and they should see it on a grand scale, for they would be gazing at it through the colossal aerial magnifying glass with its layers of varying density.

Sitting in his boat he now carefully observed the Swordholm with his diopter, the lenses of which he had greatly strengthened. The primary necessity was to bring out the most striking characteristics of the formation, a task which nature had already partly performed for him. In addition to this he required a stone pine, a cypress, a marble palace and a terrace with orange trees planted against the wall.

As soon as he had sketched the outline of the skerry, his plan was clear. He landed with his cargo consisting of a crow-bar, a scraper, a coil of zinc wire, a bucket of yellow ochre, a large tar-brush, an axe, a saw, nails, and a number of dynamite cartridges.

When he had unloaded his boat, he felt like a modern Robinson Crusoe, challenging all nature to battle; but a Robinson Crusoe far stronger and far more certain of victory, because he carried with him all the resources of civilisation.

As soon as he had put his alidad rule in position on an improvised surveyor's table, he began to work.

He need but scrape the lichen—where it existed—off the mountain ridge whose precipitous formation bore an excellent likeness to the deposited strata of the south, and leave a few horizontal lines darker than the strata themselves. It was no difficult task; the scraper glided over the smooth surface like a scene-painter's brush over a large canvas.

Every now and then a feeling of self-contempt swept over him for wasting time and energy on these puerilities, but bodily exertion drove the blood into his head so that he saw trifles magnified; he felt like a Titan, storming creation, improving the hieroglyphics of the Creator, turning the axis of the earth so that the south should come a little nearer to the north.

When he had finished with the striping of the rock—the whole surface he required was but a few yards in length, as the layers of air would magnify it—he went on to the manufacture of the stone pine. On the ridge of the rock stood a group of half-grown pine trees which, in the mirages, looked like the edge of a wood. He would have to cut down half a dozen, so as to isolate the most suitable one, the one which stood outlined against the sky.

To saw off the remainder was the work of half an hour. The one chosen was a slender tree with nothing but a crown of foliage, because the close proximity of the others had prevented the branches from growing lower down the trunk. He had to thin out the crown with his axe, so as to produce the characteristic umbrella formation. It was easily done. But as he examined his creation through the diopter, he found that the style was still not perfect, but that he must wire the uppermost branches and make them stand up, while the side ones would have to be made to droop a little downwards and outwards.

When the stone pine was finished, he drank a glass of wine and looked round for the raw material out of which to manufacture his cypresses. He soon found it in some cone-shaped junipers of which he had but to select those which were silhouetted against the sky; axe and knife did the rest. But as they looked very light, he dissolved some lamp-black in a bucketful of water and sprinkled them with the mixture, until they had acquired the genuine churchyard tint.

When he regarded his handiwork, he had misgivings. He remembered the dismal tale of the little girl who trampled on a piece of bread. And when the white sea-gulls began to scream above his head, he thought of the

two black ravens who had come down from heaven to carry a soul to hell.

But after he had rested a little while and the blood had returned to his brain, he smiled at his work and his childish fears. If nature had not been quite as quick in the origination of the species, it had not been for want of will but for want of knowledge.

He now turned his energies to the marble palace. But as that had been his starting point, and he had carefully thought out the whole matter at home on his sofa, this task was no more difficult than the rest.

The calcareous deposit was ready to hand and easily manipulated into the façade; there were but a few square yards of it, but that was all that was required; he would merely have to break off the slabs of eurite which the weather had already loosened. The crow-bar was sufficient to begin with, but at the base he had to blast them off with a dynamite cartridge.

When the shot resounded and the fragments rained down, he realised for an instant the longing of the poet to empty the powder magazines of all the standing armies at once into a volcano, and so deliver humanity from the pain of existence and the troubles of evolution.

Now the marble slab was laid bare; the crystals of the grainy limestone glittered like the crystals of a sugar-loaf in the sunshine. He

indicated a rough-hewn base with his paint brush, and drew in two small, square windows. Then he drove two poles into the rock and tied a third across them, so that the whole formed a pergola. All that now remained was to take the shoots of the bear-berry, which were a fathom long, and wind them round the poles, and the vine with its clusters of grapes hanging down in festoons was ready.

Finally he painted the ground with a weak solution of hydrochloric acid. This produced brilliant spots in the green grass, meant to represent patches of bellis or galanthus, characteristic of the Roman Campagna at the time of the 'second spring,' when the wine harvest was over.

His task was done. It was evening.

But to heighten the effect of the miracle, he must also predict its happening, fix the hour when it would be vouchsafed. He knew that the weather had been very hot in Southern Europe, and that therefore a north wind must rise. The wind had been blowing from the east for some time, while the barometrical pressure on the North Sea had been low. According to the reports there was drift ice off Arholma, and as soon as the wind veered a few lines to the north, the ice floes would be compelled to drift with the current which flows westward from Oland, where the Gulf of Both-

nia empties into the Baltic. If therefore a northern wind sprang up one of these evenings, it could be safely relied on to last for some days. As this meant a clear atmosphere, he would be in a position to predict the miracle on the day before its happening.

The hour was but a trifling matter, for a mirage only appears a few hours after sunrise, usually between ten and eleven.



## CHAPTER X

BORG was working behind locked doors that night, so as to remain undisturbed and devote the whole evening to his work, his great work which he had planned for the last ten years and hoped to complete when he was fifty years old. It was his great ambition, the purpose that kept him alive, and was guarded jealously like a secret.

He rejoiced at the thought of being his own master for a few hours, for since the ladies had arrived on the island he had been compelled to spend every evening with them, and what ought to have been rest and recreation had thus become a strain and a tedious routine.

He loved the girl and was determined to marry her; to live with her in that complete union of body and soul where every hour of leisure is spent in intimate communion. But this state of affairs, which was neither marriage nor freedom, but made it incumbent on him to go and see her every day at certain hours and amuse her, whether he felt in the mood or not, irritated him like a duty to be performed at any cost. She clung to him, ever ready to

take what he had to give, more especially as he possessed the talent of being always original and entertaining. As, however, he received nothing from her in return, he felt, every now and then, the need of renewing himself. But as soon as he stayed away, she became restless and nervous, subjected him to searching cross-examinations, and wound up by asking him whether she had been too officious, a question which he, as a well-bred man, could not answer in the affirmative.

He opened a cupboard which contained his manuscripts and a number of cardboard boxes full of notes. These notes were written on small pieces of paper and fastened to half-sheets of foolscap in the way in which a collection of dried plants is arranged; they expressed the thoughts which had occurred to him during his investigations. It amused him to rearrange them again and again according to new methods, in order to determine whether natural phenomena may be arranged in as many ways as a human brain desires, or whether they can be only arranged according to one principle, laid down by nature; in other words whether nature has been working in accordance with a definite law or not.

This occupation fired him with the idea that it was really he who had reduced chaos to order, he who had separated light and dark-

ness; that chaos had only ceased with the birth of the organ of consciousness, capable of distinguishing between light and darkness when they were still one. The thought intoxicated him; he felt his ego growing, his brain-cells germinating, bursting their seed-coats, multiplying and forming new conceptions which, in due time, should go forth as thoughts and fall as leaven into the brains of strangers; transforming millions of them, if not before, then after his death, into hotbeds for his thought-seeds . . .

A knock at the door recalled him to reality. Excitedly, as if he had been disturbed at a tryst, he asked who was there?

It was a messenger from the ladies, enquiring whether the Superintendent would not come across?

He sent a message to say that he had important work to do which would keep him at home unless, indeed, there was a serious reason demanding his presence.

There was silence for a while. But as he foresaw what would happen, he abandoned the idea of working and began to put away his manuscripts. He had just finished when he heard the old lady coming up his stairs. Instead of waiting for her to knock, he went to the door and threw it wide open.

‘Miss Marie is ill?’

The mother was taken aback, but immediately recovering her self-possession, she begged him to go and see her daughter, as it was impossible to send for a doctor.

Borg was not a physician, but he had read elementary pathology and therapeutics and had observed his own symptoms, and those of all sick people who came within his circle of observation; he had pondered on the nature of diseases and remedies and had finished by establishing certain rules of treatment which he adopted in his own case.

When he was told that Miss Marie had convulsions, he promised to visit her in half an hour and bring some remedies with him.

It was no difficult matter for him to guess the nature of her malady. It had not been mentioned in the first message, and therefore it must have occurred in the interval between the first and the second; therefore it was the result of his refusal to spend the evening with her and her mother. It was a case of that soul-sickness which he knew so well and which bears the vague name of hysteria. A little pressure on the will; a wish not fulfilled; a plan crossed; and immediately there follows a general malaise, during which the soul attempts to find the cause of the pain in the body, without being able to localise it.

In the Pharmacodynamics he had often

come across cautious little riders bracketted beside the name of a drug, such as 'in a manner not yet known' or 'its mode of operation is not exactly known.' Observation and reflection had made it clear to him that because mind and matter are one, the effect of a drug is not only chemico-dynamic, but also mental. Modern medical science had dropped the remedy, or the material foundation, and adopted, in hypnotism, a merely mental, or in diet and exercise a frequently harmful method. He believed these extremes to be necessary and useful stages of transition, although experiments had demanded many victims: the excitement of many a nervous patient was brought to a still higher pitch by the use of cold water, while a warm bath would have had a calming effect; and weak patients were still further weakened by enforced exercise in inclement weather.

He held that the old-fashioned remedies had still a value as material for object lessons, popularly speaking, in order to excite certain moods or change existing ones. The group of astringents which effect a contraction of the stomach, also produces a concentration of the scattered forces of the soul. The debilitated drunkard knows this from experience when he winds up his run-down mechanism in the morning with a bitter.

This girl felt physically ill without in reality being so. He therefore selected a number of drugs, the first of which was calculated to effect a positive disorder which should compel the patient to overcome her soul-sickness and localise her illness in the body. For this purpose he took from his medicine chest a dose of asafetida, that most repugnant of all drugs, well constituted to produce a feeling of general illness, and even convulsions. Her whole body, with its senses of smell and taste should rebel against it, and the soul should strain all its functions to eject it.

This would make her forget her imaginary ailment. It would only be necessary afterwards gradually to mitigate the horror of the first shock, by inducing transition stages, until finally complete absence of distress brought about by a succession of cooling, agreeable and soothing sedatives, would create a feeling of positive pleasure, just as it is delightful to remember dangers and troubles successfully overcome.

He put on a white cashmere jacket, a cream tie with a faint amethyst stripe, and, for the first time since the arrival of the ladies, he clasped the gold bangle round his wrist. He could not have said why he did so; it was merely a response to a mood assailing him from the sick-bed which he was about to visit.

When he caught sight of his reflection in the looking-glass, he thought his appearance gentle and sympathetic, as well as striking; apt to attract attention, without unduly exciting a nervous patient.

Then he collected his requisites like a conjuror who is about to give a performance and went to see the invalid.

The girl was lying on the sofa. She was wearing a Persian dressing-gown, and her hair was down. Her eyes were wide-open and stared scornfully at the visitor.

For a moment Borg felt embarrassed, but only for a moment; then he approached the sofa and took her hand in his.

'What's the matter, Miss Marie?' he asked sympathetically.

She looked at him sharply, as if she wanted to look through and through him, but made no reply.

He pulled out his watch and examined her pulse. 'You are feverish,' he said.

It was not true, but he had to win her confidence; it was part of the cure.

'Feverish! I should think so! I feel as if I were on fire.'

She had been given a chance to complain and her feeling of enmity against the visitor melted away.

'If you will promise to obey me, I will cure

you,' continued Borg, putting his hand to her forehead.

At the word *obey* the patient winced; she evidently had no intention of obeying; but at that very moment the bangle appeared below the cuff and slipped over the wrist; the resistance of the *malade imaginaire* ceased.

'Do as you like with me,' she answered, submissively, gazing with fascinated eyes at the golden snake which seemed to inspire her with a feeling of uneasiness, of fear of something unknown.

'I'm not a professional physician, as you know,' he continued, 'but I have studied medicine and know quite enough to treat your case. I have a drug here, very unpleasant to take, but which is infallible. I'm no secret-monger and will tell you what it is. It is a resinous sap extracted from the root of a plant which grows in the stony wilds of Arabia.'

At the word *Arabia* the girl looked up; perhaps a thought of *all the perfumes of Arabia which could never sweeten Lady Macbeth's little hand again* crossed her mind.

She took the spoon in her hand and smelt the contents.

'I can't!' she exclaimed, shuddering and throwing back her head.

He gently put his arm round her shoulders and offered her the spoon once again. 'Now,



let me see that you are a good girl,' he said encouragingly. And with these words he poured the drug down her throat without her being able to resist.

She sank back into the sofa cushions, shaking convulsively with disgust which the evil-smelling gum had aroused in her. Her face expressed horror, as if all the evils and abominations of the whole world had been poured down her throat. With a trembling voice she entreated him to give her a drink of water.

He refused and she had to lie down and abandon herself to the unpleasant sensations caused by the nauseous medicine.

When he saw that she was almost sick with loathing, he brought out his second drug.

'Now, Miss Marie,' he said cheerfully, 'we have wandered long enough in stony Arabia; we will climb the Alps and drink mountain air, condensed in the bitter, golden root of the health-giving gentian.'

The unresisting girl swallowed the bitter drug; she started as if she had been stabbed. But immediately afterwards she drew herself up as if strength and energy were flowing back into her soul. The powerful drug, although it irritated the gastric membrane and accelerated her pulse, had taken away the loathsome flavour of the fetid gum.

'We'll extinguish the fires with these rugs,'

continued Borg. 'Then we'll travel to the shores of Brittany to fetch the balm of the mild carragheen. Do you feel its soothing effect? Can you sense the sea-breezes?'

The flushed features of the sufferer relaxed. And as the physician considered her now strong enough to pay attention to his words, he told her stories of his adventures on the coast of Brittany, revived memories of his cruises in the Atlantic, described the life of the fisher-folk of Quimper, and sea-bird shooting at Sarzau.

She listened to his stories with an air of languid interest. Therefore he suddenly stopped short, and made her take a *symphony* as he called it. It consisted of the classical rue, well-known to lovers in the Middle-Ages who used it as a spice in their wine, the heavenly angelica, the homely mint, a trace of bennet for the sake of freshness, and a few drops of juniper oil to call up to her mind a picture of the green forest.

He massaged her soul with moods, made her forget her morbid fancies by taking her, in imagination, from place to place, making her visit the old world and the new; see many countries, many nations, many climates.

When she seemed tired, he gave her a spoonful of lemon juice with a little sugar, which cooled and soothed her. The simple refresh-

ing drink seemed so delightful after the terrible half-hour through which she had passed, that a happy smile played round her lips.

'Turn round to the wall, now,' begged Borg, 'and try to sleep for five minutes while I go and talk to your mother.'

He was exhausted and longed for a breath of fresh air to restore his vigour. He glanced at the luminous night-sky and the steel-blue sea, closed his eyes and made his mind a blank; and, little by little, order recovered the reins in his confused brain and the latter continued its interrupted movement.

He stood rigid, half-asleep, with folded arms, plunged in solitude, until he was disturbed by a thought humming in his right ear: 'What a child she is in spite of her thirty-four years.' He roused himself with a start and went back into the cottage.

Miss Marie was sitting on the sofa, her hair coquettishly arranged round her shoulders, looking the picture of health and young vigour.

Borg produced from his bag a bottle of wine and a packet of Russian cigarettes.

'Now you must behave as if you were quite strong again,' he said, 'and as if we had just met after a long separation. And then you must drink a glass of sweet wine from Sicily and smoke a cigarette, for this is part of the cure.'

The girl seemed to make an effort to hide some secret suffering but she drank the wine while she gazed at the bangle.

'You are looking at my bangle,' said Borg, breaking the silence.

'No, I'm not,' replied the girl, denying an obvious fact.

'It was given to me by a woman who is dead, now, so I could not return it to her.'

'Have you been in love, then?' asked the girl, sceptically.

'Yes, I have been in love, but with my eyes wide open! Why should one disregard common-sense when one is about to take the most important step in life, when it is considered praiseworthy under all other circumstances to use it?'

'Do you mean to say that lovers ought to be calculating?'

'Certainly! As calculating as possible, as it is a question of giving rein to one of the most powerful instincts.'

'Instincts?'

'Yes, instincts.'

'Don't you believe in love?'

'You are asking me questions to which there is no answer. Do I believe in love, generally speaking? There are so many kinds of love, and they differ as much from one another as black differs from white. How can I believe in both, in all kinds, at the same time?'

‘But the highest kind?’

‘The spiritual love! In three storeys, though, like an English house: at the top the study, below the bed-room, and on the ground floor the kitchen.’

‘How practical! But love, the great passion, does not calculate. In my opinion life holds no higher good. I picture it as a storm, a thunderclap, a waterfall!’

‘As a brutal, untamed, natural instinct? As such it manifests itself in animals and the lower races of mankind . . .’

‘Lower? Aren’t all men equals?’

‘Yes, yes! All men resemble one another like eggs. Youths and old men, young men and women, Hottentots and Frenchmen. Certainly, they resemble one another! Look at us two! What is there to differentiate us? Only the beard. But excuse me now, Miss Marie, I see you are quite yourself again and I must be going. Sleep well!’

He rose from his chair and seized his hat, but at the next moment the girl was standing by his side. She took his two hands in hers, and entreated him with the same look which had conquered him in the first instance.

‘Stay with me!’

The burning eyes and the pressure of her hands affected him in the same way in which he believed a young girl to be affected when

she is exposed to the ardent attacks of a seducer. He became confused, a feeling of shame, of offended manhood, rebelled against her charm.

'Pull yourself together !' he said, releasing his hands, and an indifference which he was far from feeling made his voice sound cold and cutting.

'Stay with me or I shall seek you in your room !' was the excited reply which seemed to hold a threat.

'You'll find my door locked !'

'Are you a man ?'

'Yes, so much so, that in love I want not only to choose but also to attack. I won't be seduced !'

He went; and as he closed the door, he heard the fall of a human body and the crash of furniture.

As soon as he was outside, he was seized by a strong inclination to turn back, for owing to the mental strain which he had just undergone, he was in a state of weakness which made him very susceptible to the suffering of others. But after he had been alone for a few seconds he recovered his self-control; his strength returned and he resolved to sever this connexion which threatened completely to absorb his intellectual life. He must hesitate no longer

but break off his relations with a woman who had shown plainly that it was but his body which she desired, while she rejected the spirit which he had been trying to breathe into the lifeless statue. She enjoyed the sound of his voice, but she responded to his ideas only when they were likely to lead to her own personal advantage. He had frequently caught her scrutinising the lines of his figure; she sometimes, apparently absent-mindedly, clutched his upper arm, the swelling muscles of which formed a ridge under the soft cloth. He thought of her repeated challenges while bathing, sailing, or climbing to the look-out, a spot which he never visited because standing on a height without sufficient protection troubled his nerves. And after her uncontrolled outburst of hysteromania, he realised, with a shrinking, that she did not belong to that more highly evolved race of women, capable of individualising their love, but that he was to her nothing more or less than her indispensable sexual counterpart.

He walked down to the shore to get cool, but the night was warm; the sea lay before him untroubled; the north-western sky was pale as a melon, but night lay on the water in the east; the boulders were still warm and he sat down in one of those natural chairs carved out of the stone by the frost and polished by the waves.

He thought of the recent scene. He had calmed down now and saw the matter in another light. It had always been his dream to win the love of a woman so completely that she should come to him, humbly, and say : 'I love you ! deign to bestow on me the splendid gift of your love !' It was in accordance with all the laws of nature that the weaker should come to the stronger, in all humility ; the reverse was an absurdity, although it was a common practice with all those who still clung to the old superstition that there was a quality of mysticism, of exaltation in every woman. Had it not been proved up to the hilt that her mysticism was but chaos, and her exultation a poetical delusion, created by the unavowed desires of the amorous male ?

Now she had come to him ; he was living his dream. This new woman of a new period, free from all prejudice, had revealed her ardent love to him, and he had rejected her. Why had he done it ? Probably he was still under the ban of conventionality and custom. For there had been nothing shameless in her offer, no trace of the wanton, no unchaste gesture, no lascivious glance. She loved him in her way. What more did he want ? With such love he could safely bind himself to her for all life. Surely, not many men could boast of having kindled so transcendent a flame ! And



yet he felt no pride in his victory, for he knew his own value. Rather he felt a heavy responsibility which he would fain shake off. He resolved on flight.

In imagination he packed his boxes; he stripped his writing-table of all his instruments, all the shining, glittering trifles, until there was nothing left but the plain green cloth. He took away the lamp which had radiated light in the night and colour in the day-time. There was an empty space. He divested the walls of their pictures, their hangings, and the white, dismal, mathematical spaces became apparent. He removed the books from the shelves and the terrible blanks yawned in his face. Monotony, barrenness, poverty !

He was overcome with physical fatigue; fear of the journey, of the unknown which lay before him, paralysed him; the breaking of his habits, the want of her society troubled him. In imagination he beheld her exquisite beauty, at once childlike and stately; he heard her complaints, noticed her pallid cheeks which, doubtless would blush again under the kisses of some other lover.

He had been suffering all the sorrows of a separation for a quarter of an hour, which seemed to him a long stretch of endless, grey time, when he noticed, in the dusk of the sum-

mer night, a woman's figure on the ridge of the mountain, clearly outlined against the pale sky. The beautiful proportions of the figure, which he knew so well, looked nobler, statelier, seen against the light, yellow cloud which left it uncertain whether it was irradiated by the last rays of the setting sun, or the first shafts of sunrise. The figure had come, to all appearance from the little custom house, and seemed to be looking for something or someone. Her head was uncovered and her hair still flowed down her back.

She turned her head quickly in all directions; suddenly she seemed to have discovered what she sought. With quick steps she hurried down to the shore where the object of her search was sitting, motionless, without strength to fly, or power to call out to her.

When she had reached him she knelt down by his side, put her head on his knees and stammered words, wildly, shyly, entreatingly, as if she were dying with shame and yet could not stop her tongue from uttering her heart-broken appeal.

'Don't leave me,' she sobbed. 'Despise me, if you must, but don't go away! Love me, love me, or you'll drive me to that place from whence there is no return.'

A strong man's infinite, overwhelming

yearning for love quickened his heart-beat. But the sight of the kneeling woman also aroused in him the inherited chivalry of the man who looks upon his wife as his mistress and not his slave. He jumped up, drew her into his arms and pressed her against him.

'Side by side, Marie,' he said, 'not at my feet. You love me because you know that I love you, and now you are mine for all time. I'll never let you out of my arms again while there is life in both of us! Do you hear that; You are mine for the whole long life! I will set you upon a throne and give you power over me and all that is mine, my name, my property, my honour and my work! But if you should ever forget that it was I who gave you the power, or if you misuse it, I shall overthrow you as one overthrows a tyrant; I shall fling you into an abyss so profound that you will never again see the sunshine! But that will never happen, for you love me; you do love me, don't you, my beloved?'

He had seated her in the rock-chair and was kneeling before her, his head in her lap.

'I lay my head in your lap,' he continued, 'don't cut off my hair while I sleep in your arms! Let me lift you up to me, don't drag me down! Be better than I am, you can, for I shall protect you from all contact with the squalor and misery of the world into which I

must go! Let the great virtues which I lack ennoble you; then we shall be a perfect whole.'

His emotion was beginning to take on the sober colour of thought; he seemed to be wanting to subdue her excitement. But she interrupted him by pressing her flaming cheeks against his. As he did not respond to her caress, she pressed a passionate kiss on his lips.

'You child,' she said, 'don't you dare to kiss me, even though no one can see us?'

At her words he sprang up, threw his arms round her and repeatedly kissed her on her slender throat, until she released herself and stood before him, laughing.

'You little savage!' she scolded.

'The savage is near enough! Beware!' he replied, and again took her into his arms.

They strolled along the warm, soft sand, which whispered round their feet.

They saw the flashes of the distant lighthouse, for the air was cooler now and the dew had fallen. They heard the bellowing of the seals on the cliffs outside; it sounded like the clamour of a shipwreck.

They walked about for an hour, several hours, talking of their first meeting, their secret thoughts, the future, the coming winter, proposing some trips abroad.

In the meantime they had reached the pro-

montory where a stone heap and a cross commemorate a shipwreck, at which several lives were lost. All at once two shadows appeared, crept by and vanished again.

'Vestman and his sister-in-law,' said Borg. 'If I were her husband I should drown her.'

'And let him go scot free?' replied the girl, more sharply than she intended.

'He's not married,' replied Borg curtly. 'That makes a difference.'

A silence followed, an embarrassing silence, during which they tried to think of a subject of conversation. And all the while common-sense, having cast off the spell, whispered and whispered. He longed for the ecstasy, the intoxication, which shut out reality, transformed greyness into rose-colour, built pedestals painted cracked china with golden edges.

At the wall of rock they turned back and began to retrace their footsteps. The wind which had been asleep was waking up; the embarrassed lover felt its freshness; it was the expected north-wind, which he greeted now as a saviour. The girl's opposition on a vital point had destroyed an illusion. He felt that though they were forged together, their two minds would never fuse into one unless, indeed, he gave way to her. He seized the opportunity to rise without trampling on her.

'Why do the natives hate me?' he asked, à-propos of nothing.

'Because you are above them.' The girl had said it almost in spite of herself, without realising what she was admitting.

'I don't agree with you,' he replied. 'They are not clever enough to realise that.'

'Hatred might blind their eyes.'

'Well answered! But if they saw a miracle, would their eyes be opened?'

'Perhaps! If the miracle inspired awe!'

'They shall have their miracle! To-morrow at ten, the miracle shall be vouchsafed to them!'

'What miracle?'

'The miracle I promised you.'

The girl looked at him, startled, unwilling to believe her ears.

'But supposing the sky were overcast?' she laughed.

'It won't be,' replied Borg, confidently. 'But since we have already arrived at discussing the weather, we might begin to wonder what your mother will say.'

'She won't interfere,' answered Marie, promptly.

'Strange! Can a mother be indifferent to her daughter's marriage? Indifferent as to the man whose name she is going to bear?'

'Good night,' said Marie, holding up her lips to be kissed. 'You'll come to-morrow morning, won't you?'

'Certainly,' he said, 'I shall certainly come.'  
And she went.

He remained rooted to the ground and watched her slender figure, sharply silhouetted against the now sulphurous looking cloud, as she ascended the hill. When she arrived at the top she turned round and threw him a kiss. Then the dipping ground gradually swallowed her up until only her head was visible and her long hair floating in the north-wind.

## CHAPTER XI

ON the following morning as Borg, who had been accepted as son-in-law without much ado, was sitting at breakfast with his fiancée, his mind was again a prey to the old complex sensation : his admission into this small circle, the members of which were bound together by mutual interests, filled his heart with a great peace, but at the same time he was conscious of a secret fear of being compelled to allow his individuality to be swamped by the flood of considerations, imposed upon him by sympathy and relationship.

The events of last night had crashed into his life like a thunderstorm, mingling and intermingling the great things and the small which life had to offer. But instead of meeting the climax of his love affair with his eyes wide open, as he had meant to do, he had deliberately blindfolded himself. He had shut his eyes to the girl's pretended or imaginary indisposition; closed them so tightly that he had induced himself to take her malady seriously.



If he had not done so, if he had said to her 'Get up! You're all right; you're only imagining that you're ill,' she would have hated him and his object would have been foiled. Now he had won her love, perhaps because she believed that she had deceived him. Therefore his love stood in direct relation to his credulity. And as now, in the clear light of the morning, again and again he asked himself the question: 'Have I any faith in Marie?' his invigorated common-sense translated it into: 'Am I sure that I can always deceive her?' No, there was no such thing as love with open eyes; candour would never win a woman's heart; to speak to her frankly, without reserve, would be to repulse her. He had begun with a lie, he must continue to dissemble.

But there was no time for brooding while conversation see-sawed between trifles and outbursts of emotion. The feeling of well-being which he experienced in this home, in the society of these two women, made life so easy and luxurious, that he willingly gave himself up to the pleasure of being his mother-in-law's protégé, her boy, her little son. But it did not escape him that the daughter, who was head and shoulders taller than her mother, treated the latter like a child, and by a slight commutation gradually began to feel herself above a man who called one of her kind

mother-in-law. But this <sup>div</sup> overthrow of the natural order of things amused him; he had in his mind the picture of the giant who allows the child to pull three hairs out of his beard, but only three.

As they were sitting over breakfast, gossiping, they suddenly became aware of a confused murmur of voices and, looking through the window, they saw a crowd of fisherfolk standing on the breakwaters. Now they stood motionless, shading their eyes with their hands, now they jumped from one foot to the other, as if the ground were red-hot, or as if they were too excited to stand still for a moment.

‘The miracle!’ exclaimed the girl, running out of the room, followed by her mother and her fiancé.

When they had arrived on the top of the hill the women stood still, as if paralysed by terror, for in the fulness of the radiant summer morning they gazed at a pallid, colossal moon, hanging over a churchyard with black cypresses, which swam on the surface of the sea.

The Superintendent of Fisheries who had not considered the effect of the mirage from this point of observation, did not at once grasp the connexion, but the shock of so enormous and unexpected a hazard befalling law-abiding nature, made him turn deadly pale. He ran

past the two ladies who stood on the hill, petrified and motionless, and joined the throng gathered on the shore. Then the solution of the riddle occurred to him in a flash. His fictitious marble palace was framed, against his intention, on one side by a jutting, bulging wall of rock, and on the other by the crown of a pine tree. This gave the marble slab the shape of a disk and, with its too-faintly indicated windows it bore quite a good resemblance to the map of the moon.

The people had been informed that the miracle would happen at the appointed hour, according to the promise given by the Superintendent. They were staring at the moon in terrified but awed silence and, against their custom, took their hats and caps off as Borg joined them.

'Well, what do you thing of my mirage?' asked the latter, cheerfully.

Nobody answered. But the chief pilot, more courageous than the rest, pointed in the direction of the north-west, where the pale new moon hung in the morning sky.

The effect of the miracle had been paralysing, and the strong impression produced by the two moons was not to be effaced by an explanation. When the Superintendent made an attempt to enlighten the crowd, he found that his words received no attention; the people

stood there, bewildered and over-awed, as if they were in love with their terror of the inexplicable. Borg gave up all efforts to shake their faith. He had wanted to give them a proof that neither he, not nature herself, is able to break eternal laws, and accident had made a magician of him.

As he turned round he saw that his fiancée was in a state of exaltation, while her mother was trying to hold her back. When he approached her, she released herself from her mother's grip, fell on her knees, and with frenzied gestures addressed him in phrases evidently borrowed from spiritistic circles :

'Mighty spirit, we are afraid of thee ! Take fear away from our hearts that we may love thee !'

The matter was becoming more and more serious, and Borg summoned all his powers to explain the undesired miracle, in vain. The enjoyment of being mystified, the paralysis of fear, a lurking sense of honour unwilling to admit the deception, had so taken possession of her that all explanations and protestations were spoken to the wind.

The mother with her imperturbable, calm indifference, did not seem to know what to make of it all; she had forgotten the phenomenon in the alarming conduct of her daughter.

Marie's words and gestures drew the atten-

tion of the people on the shore from the mirage to Borg. When the natives saw the young woman kneeling before the white-clad man with the profound black eyes, some vague reminiscence of a young man who did miracles stirred their minds. They gathered in a group and whispered among themselves.

Encouraged by the chief pilot, one of the women ran into the nearest cottage and returned with a three-year old child, whose cheek was disfigured by a festering wound.

Apparently they connected with the ability to create a mirage a supernatural power of healing the sick.

The part which Borg was now forced to play was distasteful to him beyond words. When he saw that fishermen, pilots and customs officials forsook their work, carpenters and joiners left their job, to stand and listen to his words, as if they were prophecies and had miraculous power, he began to be afraid of a force of nature which he had evoked but could not master. However, the moment had come when he must speak his mind clearly and plainly.

'Good people,' he began, and hesitated; how was he to begin? What language was he to use? Every term required an explanation demanding knowledge which they did not possess. During those few moments in which he

mentally stared at the chasm which separated him from them, he heard footsteps and, turning round, beheld a man who looked like an elderly sailor on leave.

The man raised his slouched felt hat; he seemed despondent and embarrassed; but when he came nearer he drew himself up and was about to venture a remark, when Borg came to his rescue :

'Are you the preacher whom we are expecting from the Foundation?' he asked.

'Yes,' answered the newcomer.

'Then I wish you would say a few words to these people who are perturbed by a natural phenomenon, which they don't wish to have explained, and which I can't elucidate in a few moments,' said Borg, eager to extricate himself from a false position.

The preacher acquiesced. He stroked his long imperial and took a bible out of his pocket.

A movement went through the crowd as the people caught sight of the volume, bound in black, and some of the men bared their heads.

The preacher turned over the leaves for a little while, but finally he stopped, cleared his throat and began to read :

'And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and lo, there was a great earth-quake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of

hair, and the moon became as blood. And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places! And the kings of the earth and the great men and the rich men and the chief captains, and the mighty men and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks: Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?’

Borg, realising at once the critical turn matters had taken, drew his fiancée, half by force, away from the dangerous proximity of the preacher. He led her down to the shore, intending to show her, by placing her at the right point of observation, that the vision she had seen was no moon fallen out of the sky, but only the Italian landscape which he had promised her as a birthday present.

But it was too late. The girl's inner eye had taken hold of the vision in its first shape, and the preacher's thrilling explanation had burnt it still deeper into her consciousness. Borg had played with elementals, had called

up a foe to his assistance; now all had gone over to the enemy and he stood alone.

While Marie's eyes were still rivetted on the preacher on the mountain, he tried to enlist the mother's help.

'Help me out of this,' he whispered. 'Come with us to the Swordholm and see for yourself that it is nothing but play, a birthday jest.'

'I can't and I won't express an opinion in these matters,' replied the old woman. 'But I believe—you had better get married soon.'

It was a sober and prosaic counsel, but from the lips of the old woman, a mother, it sounded shrewd and intelligent; moreover, it was in keeping with the promptings of his own common-sense. He went back to the girl, threw his arms round her, looked into her eyes with a smile which she could not fail to understand, and kissed her on the lips.

His kiss broke the spell which the man on the mountain had woven round her; she took her fiancé's arm, and with dancing footsteps returned with him to her mother's cottage.

'Thank you,' she whispered, gazing into his eyes, 'thank you for—how shall I say it?'

'For having delivered you from the mountain-ogre,' suggested Borg.

'Yes, from the ogre.'



And she turned round to look at the danger which she had escaped.

'Don't look back!' warned her lover and drew her into the cottage, while the wind carried down to him a few stray words from the preacher's sermon.

## CHAPTER XII

ONE morning, a week later, as the superintendent awoke from a long, refreshing sleep, his first clear thought was that he must leave the island and find a refuge where he could be alone, collect his thoughts, come to himself again. The arrival of the preacher had had the desired effect in one direction, it had 'put a check on the mob'; the noise, the brutalities, had ceased. But, on the other hand, Borg was unable to enjoy the newly won peace, for his fiancée's excited state of mind did not permit him to lose sight of her for a moment.

During this last week he had been with her all day long, guarding her from morning till night, attempting, by endless discussions on religion, to break the spell which the preacher's seductive sermons were weaving round her. He seemed to be fighting the struggles of his adolescence over again, only, as fresh evidence had been discovered since then, he had to re-edit his whole defence. He improvised, as he went along, new explanations of God, faith, miracles, eternity, prayer,

imagining all the time that the girl understood him.

But when, after three days, she had not budged from her position, he was compelled to admit that this matter of emotion lay outside common-sense; he changed his tactics and endeavoured by awakening the erotic element, to drive out one emotion by another.

But he soon found that this was a mistake; the discussion of the future and what it held in store for them merely intensified the girl's emotional life. He soon discovered the secret bridges which span religious ecstasy and the intoxication of the senses.

It was an easy way from the love of Christ to the love of a human man across the wide draw-bridge of neighbourly love; from chastity to resignation across the foot-path of mortification of the senses. A little teasing was followed by the unpleasant feeling of contrition which had to be dissipated by the delightful sensation of a reconciliation.

In his despair he decided to break away the bridges, place her face to face with brutal lust, rouse in her a longing for things temporal which he painted to her in glowing colours.

But when the successful exponent drew back at the last moment, her heart was chilled with disappointment. And when he attempted to give her emotions a loftier content by guiding

her thoughts to the subject of a family and children, she recoiled, terrified, and declared that she wanted no children, silencing him with what was then a favourite formula with a certain group of women : she declined to become the mother of his children, declined to bear his offspring, and bring them into the world at the risk of her own life.

This made him realise that nature had erected a barrier between them of which he knew nothing ; but he found a grain of comfort in the thought that it was perhaps only the fear of the butterfly to lay its egg and die ; the foreboding of the flower that the formation of seed meant the destruction of its beauty.

He had exhausted himself during this week ; the delicate wheels of his thoughts had stopped in their bearings and the mainspring of the mechanism had become slack.

If, on the day after a discussion of this kind he attempted to do a few hours' work, he found that his head was filled with nonsense ; futile remarks were repeated almost audibly before his ears ; his memory reproduced the gestures and facial expressions which he had used during a dispute ; he thought of answers which he might have made ; the memory of a pertinent reply gave him a moment's pleasure. It was evident he thought of nothing but trifles.

He realised, now, that he had attempted to

reduce chaos to order; he had been talking to a school-boy believing himself to be all the time exchanging thoughts with a mature woman; he had spent a vast amount of power without receiving anything in return. He had put a sponge into his soul, and the soul was sucked dry.

He was sick of it all; he longed to leave her, for a time at least. To give her up entirely was out of the question.

As he was looking out of the window, at five o'clock in the morning, he gazed at a dense wall of mist, immovable in spite of the faint south wind. The light, a delicate, white darkness, attracted instead of repelling him; it would hide and remove him from this small part of the globe to which he was fettered.

Barometer and weather-cock promised sunshine for later on. Therefore he took out his boat, making no preparations, but merely providing himself with sea-chart and compass. Even these were almost unnecessary, for he could hear the bell of a buoy, half a mile off, in the direction of the spot where he intended to land.

He hoisted the sail and was soon shrouded in fog. Here, where the eye was not subjected to impressions of shape and colour, he realised to the full the pleasure of being detached from the ever-changing outer world. He was sur-

rounded, as it were, by his own atmosphere. He glided along, alone as if he were on another star, in a medium which was not air but a watery vapour, far more pleasant and refreshing to breathe than the parching air with its unnecessary seventy-five per cent. of nitrogen which, for no conceivable object, had remained over when the mass of the earth had been formed out of the gaseous chaos.

It was no dark, murky fog, but a light mist, resembling liquid silver, enriching the sunlight. Warm and soft as cotton wool, it enfolded his bruised soul, protecting it from blow and pressure. For a moment he enjoyed this waking rest of the senses, soundless, colourless, without smell. The certainty that he would not come into contact with others refreshed his tormented soul. He would not be tortured by questions; he need not reply, need not talk. The apparatus stood still for a moment. He was perfectly insulated.

But soon he began to think again, clear, consecutive thoughts. In imagination he once more lived through the last few weeks; it was all so petty, so small, that he had to get rid of it before he could open his mind to new impressions.

He heard the warning bell in the distance, at intervals of a few minutes, and, guided by the sound, he steered a course straight into the fog.

Once more the world was plunged in silence; only the plashing of the waves at the bow and the boiling of the waters in the wake showed that he was moving. Then a sea-gull screamed in the mist, and at the same moment he fancied that he heard the splashing of a boat behind him. When he hailed her, however, fearful of an accident, he received no answer, but he could tell from the sound of the water that she was standing off.

A little later on his attention was caught by the top of a mast with mainsail and topsail appearing on the weather side; but neither the hulk of the ship nor the steersman were visible, as both were hidden by the swell.

The incident would not have troubled him at any other time; but now it impressed him, as things inexplicable at the moment do impress the mind, and often even rouse a vague sense of fear, from which it is but a step to the conviction that one is being pursued. His distrust quickened as, directly after, the phantom ship, looking as if she had been painted on the fog, passed him under the lee, without his being able to catch a glimpse of the steersman who was concealed by the sprit sail.

He hailed her again; but instead of a reply the boat veered, sufficiently to allow him to see that the helm was deserted. And immediately after she was swallowed up again by the all-effacing fog.

Borg, who did not know what fear of the unknown meant, tried to think of an explanation, but was unable to solve the riddle. Why did the steersman hide himself? For it went without saying that a sailing boat which was not adrift must carry a steersman on board. Why did he not want to be seen? As a rule there are three reasons which induce a man to go into hiding: he may have committed a crime, he may want to be left in peace, or he may want to strike fear into the heart of a fellow-creature. That the unknown sailor was not seeking solitude was obvious, as he steered the same course, and if it was his object to frighten a man who knew no fear, he should have hit on a better plan.

Borg continued on his tack while the phantom ship followed obstinately under his lee, at a distance which gave her the appearance of a patch of condensed mist.

As soon as the wind freshened the fog lifted a little. The sunlight, turned into silver by the mist, lay on the waves like a huge argent bar. With the increasing wind the warning from the buoy became more frequent.

Now he steered straight into the sunlight, where the wall of fog was riven, and made fast headway in the direction of the buoy.

There it lay before him, dancing and rocking on the waves, scarlet and shining wet,



looking like a lung with its large, black wind-pipe slanting upwards. Presently, as a wave compressed the air, it gave a snort, as if the sea were bellowing to the sun. The ground chain rattled until it had run off, and as the wave subsided, sucking back the air, a roar arose from the deeps that might have come from the gigantic mouth of a mastodon.

It was the first exhibition of power and strength coming after a month of puerilities and trifling.

He was forced to admire the human genius who had attached a bell to the treacherous wolf, the sea, forcing it to warn its defenceless victims. He envied this hermit fettered to a cliff in the middle of the ocean, vieing day and night with wind and wave in bellowing, so that it could be heard miles off; its voice was the first to welcome the stranger; its groan of agony the only one which fell on germane ears.

The brief spell of sunshine was soon over. Semi-darkness again enfolded the boat which now stood off and then steered a course to the skerry where Borg intended to rest for a little while. He stood for half an hour on the same tack until he could hear the surge beating on the shore; he veered to get under the lee, and a few moments later the boat shot into a little bay which he could use as a harbour.

It was the most distant skerry beyond the

entrance. It consisted of a few acres of red gneiss and boasted no vegetation with the exception of a little lichen on those spots not scraped clean by the drift ice. It served as a resting place for various species of sea-gulls which screamed as Borg moored his boat and climbed to the ridge. There he wrapped his rug round him and sat down in a well polished cleft which formed a comfortable easy chair.

Here, without witnesses, without an audience, he gave rein to his thoughts; he confessed to himself, examined his inmost mind and listened to his inner voice. For two months only he had been in contact with his own kind and already, by the law of adaptation, he had lost the best part of himself. He had fallen into the habit of agreeing with others so as to avoid quarrelling; he had made a practice of bending that he might not be broken; he had developed into a glib, unprincipled man of the world, completely given up to trifles; compelled to speak an abbreviated, simplified language, he felt that in the gamut of his vocabulary the semi-tones had been lost, that his thoughts were running in old well-worn ruts which always led back to the starting-point. Old axioms, that one should respect the faith of others, for instance, or that everybody should be allowed to be happy in his own way, had crept back into his mind. The de-

sire to please had induced him to play the magician and had reached its climax when he had saddled himself with a dangerous rival who threatened to rob him at any moment of the only human soul which he yearned to bind to his own.

He smiled at the thought of how he had been all along deceiving those who believed that they were deceiving him. But a half-audible, involuntary : 'You fools !' made him start, afraid lest somebody had overheard him.

Once more he relapsed into his reverie and the silent thoughts came and went. They believed that they had imprisoned his soul, and he had bound them, hand and foot. They fancied that he was doing their bidding, and did not know that he was making use of them to gauge the power of his soul and glory in his strength.

These thoughts which, up to the present, he had kept at arm's length, now greeted him as the children of his soul ; big, healthy children they were ; he would no longer disown them. What had he done but what his foes would do if they had the ability ! And this girl, who imagined that she could play on him as on a barrel organ, for her amusement, never suspected that he had chosen her to become the sounding board of his soul . . .

The current of his thoughts ceased to flow ;

he jumped up; he had distinctly heard footsteps on the rocks. While admitting the possibility of an auditory deception, produced by solitude and the fear of being taken by surprise, he thought it wise to go down to the shore and have a look at his boat. When he found it undisturbed, he resolved to walk round the skerry and search for the other boat, for another boat there must be if anybody beside himself was on the island.

He walked across the boulders on the shore and soon found under the lee of the nearest promontory a flat boat with a sprit sail and rigging resembling in every detail the one which he had met outside. Doubtless the sailor was on the skerry!

Borg dived into the fog, careful to keep within the vicinity of the boats so as to cut off the intruder's retreat. But after repeatedly shouting in vain, he came to the conclusion that if he wanted to catch the mysterious stranger, he must leave the boats to their fate. He removed the tillers, so as to make flight impossible, and a few moments later he was again lost in the fog. For a little while he followed the footsteps which he could plainly hear in front of him; but before long they seemed to come from the opposite direction. Tired with his exertion, and irritated by his unsuccessful efforts, he resolved to put an end

to the chase at once, without waiting for the lifting of the fog.

'If anybody is here, answer!' he shouted, 'I'm going to shoot!'

'For the Lord Jesus' sake, don't!' came a voice out of the fog.

It seemed to Borg that he had heard the voice before, but it must have been a long time ago, perhaps in the days of his boyhood. As he approached the spot where the stranger was standing, and noticed his silhouette against the wall of mist, the outlines seemed to be familiar to him. Knock-kneed, with arms which were far too long, and a deformed left shoulder, the figure had its companion on the tablets of his memory in the portrait of a school-fellow, a boy whom he knew in the third class of the preparatory school. But when the preacher's American beard appeared out of the fog, the connexion between the two pictures was broken, and he saw only the man on the mountain who had applied the Revelation of St. John to his mirage.

Hat in hand, his face blanched with fear, the itinerant preacher approached the Superintendent who felt anything but pleased with the company of this sneaking pursuer, for his threat of shooting had been bluff and he carried no gun with him. He addressed him sharply, to conceal his uneasiness :

‘Why are you hiding from me?’

‘I’m not hiding; the fog has hidden me,’ answered the preacher in a soft, conciliatory voice.

‘But why were you not at the helm?’

‘Why should a man be compelled to sit at the helm? I was sitting at the weather side so that the boat should sail with greater ease. I had fastened a rope to the tiller, as it is customary in my country.’

The explanations were unexceptionable, although they threw no light on the question as to why he had followed the superintendent to this lonely spot. The latter foresaw the imminency of a hand-to-hand fight of souls, for they had not been brought together by accident.

‘What are you doing out here at this early hour?’ he recommenced, taking up the broken thread.

‘I hardly know how to tell you. I have at times a strong yearning to be alone.’

This reply found an echo in the heart of the questioner, and the preacher, who read a certain amount of sympathy in Borg’s face, added : ‘You see, whenever I try to find myself in meditation and prayer, and succeed, I find my God also.’

There was a naive confession in these words;

but Borg did not want to point out the unintentional heresy and draw the conclusion : 'God is therefore myself,' or : 'God is merged in me.' He felt a certain respect for this man who could share solitude with a fiction or, in other words, be alone with himself.

But while he was scrutinising the preacher's face which, with the exception of the upper lip, was covered by a long, brown beard, a fashion common among sailors and itinerant preachers—perhaps so as to allow a clear enunciation of the spoken word and at the same time preserve an apostolic appearance—he had an intuition that what he saw was a mask, covering a face which he knew. Tormented by a nagging memory, he blurted out a straight question :

'Haven't we met before?'

'Yes,' answered the preacher. 'And you, Mr Superintendent, have, possibly without knowing it, exerted so great an influence on my life, that I may almost say you have shaped my career.'

'Have I really? Tell me all about it then, for my mind is a blank,' begged Borg, re-seating himself on the rock and inviting the other man to sit down by his side.

'It must be about twenty-five years since we were lads together in the third class . . .'

‘What was your name in those days?’

‘My name was Olsson; I was called Olox, because my father was a peasant and I wore homespun clothes.’

‘Olsson? Wait a second! You were first in arithmetic?’

‘Quite so!—One day, it was the head-master’s fiftieth birthday—we had decorated the whole school with flowers and foliage. After lessons somebody proposed that the boys of the third class should take the flowers to the head-master’s wife and daughter. I remember that you objected because, you said, the head-master’s ladies had nothing whatever to do with the school, although they frequently interfered. Nevertheless, you went along with the rest, and so did I. As I was walking upstairs you noticed my home-made clothes, I suppose, and also that I was carrying the finest bouquet. And you exclaimed in a loud voice: “Is Saul also among the prophets?”’

‘I remember nothing about it,’ replied Borg, curtly.

‘But I have never forgotten it,’ continued the preacher, and his voice shook. ‘You were telling me then, straight to my face, that I was the black sheep, the intruder, whose attention to a lady of position could only be regarded as a joke. I left school and went to business



thinking that I should be able to earn money, buy well-cut clothes, acquire good manners and the art of expressing myself well. But my appearance, my accent, my breeding were against me. I shut myself up; but the more aloof I kept from my fellow-men, the more I felt that I possessed unsuspected powers. In my boyish enthusiasm I had chosen the church as my profession; it was too late now. Solitude begot in me a dread of my fellow-men, and the dread of men made me more lonely; so lonely that I was driven to seek my only friend in God and in the Saviour of the neglected, the black sheep, the Cains of the earth, our Lord Jesus Christ! I have to thank you for that!

The last words were spoken with so much bitterness that Borg decided to be quite frank with the preacher.

‘And so you have hated me all these twenty-five years!’ he exclaimed.

‘Unspeakably! But I have left vengeance to God, and I hate you no longer.’

‘Your God is a God of vengeance, then! Do you think that he will choose you as his instrument? Or do you think that he will strike me down with his electric spark? Or that he will blow my boat to the bottom of the sea? Or afflict me with small-pox?’

‘The Lord’s ways are secret, but the ways of the unrighteous are known to all men!’

‘Can a school-boy’s foolish words be so unrighteous an act in the sight of God that He will persecute him all his life? I wonder whether this God of vengeance does not dwell in your own heart, where you meet him every now and then, as you said a little while ago?’

Caught in the snare of his own words, the preacher was no longer able to control his temper.

‘Go on! Blaspheme!’ he shouted. ‘Like father, like son! Now I understand all the wiles of Satan. You are building a house for the Lord to please a wanton. You play the conjuror and magician, so that the people shall fall down and worship the infidel! But the Lord saith: Blessed are those who wash their robes, for they shall approach the tree of life and enter through the gates of the town. But there shall remain outside all dogs and sorcerers and whoremongers and murderers and those who serve false gods and those whose tongue utters lies!’

Those words had poured from his lips with incredible volubility and excitement. Then he turned round as if afraid of a pertinent reply which would weaken their effect, and went down to the shore to find his boat.

In the meantime the fog had lifted, revealing the wide expanse of the pure azure sea, calming and relieving the oppressed spirit.

Borg lingered a little longer in his rock seat, meditating on the fact that the soul is subject to the same laws as the body.

The wind whips up a wave at Esthland; wave chases wave until the last of them, the one which breaks on the coast of Sweden, loosens a tiny pebble which supports a boulder. Years may pass before the law of cause and effect is once more borne out, but eventually the rock will totter and fall and be engulfed by the ocean; and this, again, will begin the undermining of the cliff which has been laid bare.

Twenty-five years ago his lips had flung forth a word meaningless to him. The word had penetrated through the ear into the brain of a stranger and had set it in motion so violently that it still trembled, after having influenced a man's career through a whole life-time.

Who could tell whether this innervation current had not been strengthened by contact and friction to such a degree that it would again discharge itself with increased power, and set in motion forces which would shake and ruin the lives of others?

As the preacher's boat rounded the headland

and steered a course to the East Skerry, Borg felt so convinced that he had in him an enemy bent on attacking his position, that he arose to unmoor his boat and return home to put himself into a state of defence.

## CHAPTER XIII

WHEN Borg was reseated in the boat, his spirit calmed by the gentle rocking of the waves, he felt a strong desire to spend a few more hours in complete solitude on the sea and let the summer breeze blow away the distressing of the recent scene.

Why should he fear this man's influence on his fiancée? If the girl could sink to the level of the uncultured, she was no fit mate for him. At the same time, the very fact of his being able to entertain such a doubt pained him. He was behaving like a man who lives in the eternal dread of loss, called by the absurd name jealousy. Was it because he realised his inability to hold her, betraying thereby a weakness in himself? Or was it not rather a weakness in her, preventing her from exercising the slightest self-control, as soon as it became a question of allowing the balloon to rise, weigh the anchor of religion and throw out the ballast of the emotions? He felt convinced that the latter was the case.

He had changed his course and his boat lay

now south-east of the skerry. He had never seen his prison from this point. High up, on the ridge of the mountain, stood the skeleton of the unfinished chapel, there were no workmen on the scaffolding, although the morning was far advanced. Not a single fishing boat was on the sea. Deep silence brooded over the island; even the custom house and the pilots' look-out were deserted.

He stood on another tack, intending to sail round the skerry, but outside, beyond the shelter of the land, the sea was rough. He gained little by cruising and it was fully an hour before he could make port. Now he caught a glimpse of the ladies' cottage. As soon as he rounded the point of the harbour, he could see that the whole population was crowding round the little house in whose porch the preacher was standing, bare-headed, delivering a sermon.

Convinced that he was on the eve of a battle, Borg landed, furled his canvas and went into his room.

Through the open window came the sound of many voices, singing a hymn.

He wanted to work, but the conviction that he would soon be interrupted, prevented him from beginning.

A tedious half-hour elapsed during which

he realised more clearly than ever before that he was no longer his own master; that he no longer possessed a few square yards of space where he was safe from interruption and contact with souls which clung to him as shells cling to the skin of the whale, retarding his speed by their weight.

There was a short rap, the door opened and Marie entered. Her face bore a new expression, a mixture of pained reproach and the compassion of a superior being. He waited for her to begin.

‘Where have you been?’ she said, trying to be as little supercilious as she could.

‘I’ve been sailing.’

‘Without asking me to come with you?’

‘I didn’t know whether you would care to come?’

‘You did know; but you wanted to be alone with your gloomy thoughts.’

‘Perhaps I did.’

‘I’m sure you did! Do you think I haven’t noticed it? Do you think I don’t know that you are tired of me?’

‘You can’t say I’m tired of you because—after having been with you day after day—I took the liberty one morning, long before you were up, to go sailing for a few hours. But you’ve grown tired of fishing; I haven’t seen you go out once!’

'There's no fishing now, as you know,' answered Marie, firmly convinced that she was speaking the truth.

'No, I see that!' retorted Borg, resolved to approach the mine, even at the risk of an explosion. 'The people have given up work to listen to sermons.'

The mine exploded.

'Wasn't it your suggestion to have divine service out here?'

'Yes, but only on Sundays. A man should work six days and go to church on the seventh. But not a stroke of work is done here during the whole week, and sermons are preached all day long. Instead of providing a comfortable home for themselves and their families here on earth, the men are running after something which is as uncertain as heaven. Even the building of the chapel is stopped, and I don't suppose it will ever be finished. I expect every moment to hear that the people are destitute and require relief . . .'

'That's just what I wanted to speak about,' interrupted Marie, glad of the opening which Borg had given her, and not at all realising that in so doing he had already disposed of the subject.

'I haven't come here to give alms, but to teach the people to help themselves.'



'You're a callous brute, although you pretend to have a heart!'

'And you want to parade your kind heart at my cost, without the slightest intention of sacrificing as much as a yard of the trimming of your dress!'

'I hate you! I hate you!' the girl burst out, and a terrible expression distorted her face. 'I know who you are, I know all, all, all!'

'Why don't you throw me over then?' asked Borg in a cold, steely voice.

'I shall throw you over! I shall!' She turned towards the door, but changed her mind and stayed.

Borg sat down at his writing-table, took a pen and began to write, so as to escape the temptation of renewing a discussion which was closed, as everything had been said.

He heard, as in a dream, a loud sobbing, the closing of a door, steps on the landing and the creaking of the stairs.

When he roused himself and looked at the paper on which he had been scribbling, he found that the word *Pandora* was written there so many times that quite a long time must have elapsed since the end of the scene.

The word impressed him and excited his curiosity. He had forgotten, in the course of

the years, who Pandora was, and had but a vague recollection that she was connected with the Greek Deities. He opened his encyclopædia and read :

‘Pandora, the Eve of the classical age, was sent to the earth by the revengeful gods to punish men for Prometheus’ theft of the divine fire. She brought with her all the evils which exist in the world. She is represented in poetry in the guise of a blessing, concealing a dazzling evil; a being built for deceit and irruption.’

This, like the legend of Eve, who was the cause of man’s banishment from Paradise, was mythology. But the legend was confirmed by all ages, and in his own experience the presence of a woman in this tiny part of the globe, out here by the sea, had spread twilight where he had intended to kindle a torch; it was only logical to suppose that profound wisdom was enfolded in the picturesque language of the Greek and Jewish poets.

She had turned against him; she had proved it by making common cause with the mob. And yet he was reluctant to doubt her love, even though her love was merely the striving of the sun-flower to borrow from the sun the rays of light for a poor reproduction on its yellow disc. But there was also something

mean in it, something malignant, and the desire to inflict injury. It was a struggle for supremacy, unjustifiable, because his defeat would mean the triumph of stupidity.

To tell her so would mean the severing of their relationship. The latter depended on his admission, or at any rate on his acknowledgement of her superior wisdom. Not to tell her so, on the other hand, would mean to build up life on an expedient whose results would grow and expand, and perhaps choke all possibility of an honest understanding. Was not the underlying cause of so many unhappy marriages the fact that most men started their married lives with a sometimes intentional lie? That they were often deluded, under the force of their desire for a kindred soul, into endowing women with their own qualities? This deception, this second sight, had infatuated Mill to such an extent that he was convinced that the simple woman whom he himself had trained, had inspired him with all his noblest thoughts.

From time immemorial the price to be paid for love was the obligation on the man's part to withhold his knowledge of woman. On the foundation of this silence the centuries had built a chaos of lies which science had not dared to overthrow; which the boldest states-

man had not ventured to touch; for the sake of which theologians denied their Paul, whenever the woman in the community was concerned.

His love was born and had burst into flames at the moment when she looked up to him with appealing eyes. His love died when she came to him with the triumphant smile of stupidity, after having trampled down what he had wanted to build up for her happiness and that of many others.

'Finished,' he murmured, rose from his seat and locked his door.

Dead was the hope of his youth to find the woman whom he was seeking: the woman who had sufficient brain to acknowledge that her sex was inferior to his.

It was true, he had occasionally met women who had admitted the fact, without, however, admitting the real cause of it; they had laid the blame on an imaginary oppression and had been convinced that with greater freedom they would soon far outstrip their male competitors.

And argument had followed argument.

He was loath to waste his intelligence in an unequal fight with gnats, too small and too numerous to be hit with a stick. No, all should be over and done with; he had sought in vain for what did not exist. All his energy should be devoted to work. He would sup-

press his yearning for a family and a home, suppress his sexual instinct and leave propagation to the 'breeding-stock.'

The feeling of freedom brought peace to his soul. It was as if a clutch had been removed from his brain and the latter could now function without restriction. The thought that he was no longer obliged to study his fiancée's whims in regard to his outward appearance made him remove at once an uncomfortable collar which she considered chic. He arranged his hair in a more natural way and was instantly aware of a soothing influence on his nerves, for the struggle with a style of hair-dressing which she preferred had been a constant source of irritation to him. He brought out his pipe, a dear, old friend, banished at her dictate. Dressing-gown and sandals which he had not dared to wear for many days, gave ease and freedom and the impression that he was living in a more rarified atmosphere, where he could breathe and think without hindrance.

And now, released from all necessity for adaptation, he realised the full extent of the tyranny under which he had groaned. He could walk about the room without fear of being disturbed by a knock at the door; he could indulge in his thoughts without feeling that he was disloyal.

He had not enjoyed his newly won liberty for long when he was interrupted by a knock at the door. A jerk went through his body as if some of his moorings were still fast. When he heard the voice of Marie's mother, the thought that everything was *not* finished, that he had to begin again at the beginning, struck him like a blow.

His first impulse was to keep the door locked, but his sense of what was proper, and fear of being thought a coward, held him back. When he looked into the friendly, intelligent eyes of the old lady, as she entered the room with a kindly smile, and a humorous shake of the head, the last half hour seemed but a dream from which he had awakened, glad that it had been a dream.

'So we've been teasing each other again,' began the old lady, smoothing over the unpleasantness of the remark by the familiar 'we.' 'You must get married, children, before you fall out. Trust the words of an old woman! Don't imagine that you are testing your hearts. The longer you are engaged, the worse it will be.'

'Once we are married it will be too late,' answered Borg. 'And as our dispositions and views differ so widely . . .'

'What views are you talking of? Your

views don't differ! The girl's bored when you are away and runs after the preacher. And as for her disposition, it's one thing one day and another the next, it all depends on her nerves. A clever man like you, Axel, ought to know what women are!

In his rapture at finding a woman who knew her sex, he would have liked to kiss the old lady's hand. But he remembered in time that he had heard this kind of talk whenever a woman wanted to get round him; that it was flattery rather than an admission, for directly matters had become serious, the remark had been withdrawn with interest. He controlled his impulse and answered quietly :

'Well, we must wait, mother, we must wait; we can't get married out here, but in the autumn, when we are back in town . . . that is to say if Marie will display a little more sympathy with my work and a little less repugnance to my ideas on life and the world.'

'You're so clever, Axel, it isn't strange that the poor child can't always follow you.'

'If she can't rise with me, I certainly can't sink with her! But that is what she seems to want, and want it so determinèdly that this morning I thought I could detect a secret hatred underneath it all.'

'Hatred! It's nothing but love, my boy!

Come and be kind to her and she'll be all right.'

'Not after what's been said to-day. Either the words meant something and then we are foes, or they meant nothing and then one of us, at least, is not responsible.'

'Well, she's not responsible! But you know, Axel, a woman is a child until she becomes a mother. Come along, old boy, and play with the child, or she'll choose other toys which might be more harmful.'

'But my dearest mother, I can't play all day long without growing tired. And I don't believe Marie would like to be treated as if she were a child.'

'Oh, yes, she will, as long as you don't let her think you do! Oh! Axel, Axel, what a baby you are in those things!'

Another compliment which from anybody but his mother-in-law would have been an insult. When she seized his hand to take him along with her, he felt that he was giving way. By leaving his argument unanswered, she had put the question outside discussion; she had breathed on the tangles instead of unravelling them; she had coaxed his doubts to rest, she had caressed his uneasiness until it had fallen asleep. Her feminine atmosphere, her motherliness had beguiled him into giving up his will to personal freedom.



He changed his coat and obediently, almost gladly, followed the garrulous old lady downstairs, to resume his chains and continue the game.

In the hall he met the preacher who handed him a letter with the seal of the College of Agriculture.

He immediately broke the seal. Then he put the letter into his pocket glad to have found a subject of conversation, a lightning conductor, and ran after Marie's mother, eager to tell her the news.

'We are going to have a visitor,' he said. 'The College is sending me a young man who is to learn the art of fishing.'

'I'm glad for your sake, Axel, you want male companionship,' commented the old lady, sincerely pleased.

Borg went to his waiting fiancée with light foot-steps, knowing that armed with such news he would be able to navigate round the most unpleasant explanation.

## CHAPTER XIV

A FEW days later Axel Borg went for a sail by himself, secretly, to lay salmon lines; he was late for dinner and as he walked up from the harbour, he heard laughter and gay voices which seemed to come from the porch of the ladies' cottage.

When he reached the western gable-end, he saw through the two windows of the large room, which were built in the angle of the corner of the house, that the ladies were dining in the open and entertaining a male guest. Another step, and his eyes fell on Marie, on the point of raising a glass and handing it, with flashing eyes, across the table to the visitor, of whom he could see nothing but a pair of broad shoulders.

He immediately remembered that once before he had seen the same gesture and expression in the eyes of the girl. He recollected their first meeting on the skerry, as she was offering the boatman a glass of beer. Then he had said to himself: 'She is flirting with

the lout !' He wondered why he had never seen this expression in her eyes when she looked at him. Were her glances but a reflection of his own ? Or did she hide her secret thoughts from him, her chosen victim ? He scrutinised her features. The longer he looked at her, the stranger her face appeared to him, so strange, indeed, that he could not suppress a feeling of uneasiness ; the feeling which wrings a heart on discovering itself cheated by its best beloved.

'If the eyes of an unseen observer can find out so much,' he mused, 'how much more will not the ears discover ?' And he remained in his place and continued watching her.

The mother rose and went into the kitchen leaving the young couple alone.

They immediately dropped their voices, and Marie's eyes filled with tears as she listened to the stranger's eager words :

'Jealousy is the basest of all vices : in love there is no right of possession . . .'

'Thank you for these words ! A thousand thanks !' replied the girl, raising her glass, her eye-lashes glistening with a few little tear drops. 'You are a man in spite of your youth ! You believe in woman !'

'I believe that woman is the most splendid, the best, the loftiest of nature's achievements,'

continued the young man with growing enthusiasm. 'I believe in woman because I believe in God!'

'You believe in God?' interrupted Marie. 'That proves your intelligence, for only stupidity denies the Creator.'

Borg had heard enough. To test the high degree of hypocrisy to which his life's companion had attained, he appeared suddenly upon the scene, apparently quite composed and radiant with happiness at meeting her again.

The girl retained her ecstatic expression; with the enthusiasm kindled in her by the stranger's proclamation of his faith in woman, she submitted to her fiancé's embrace and returned it with a kiss more passionate than usual.

Then she laughingly introduced Mr Blom, the expected assistant, who had arrived early in the morning and had already captured all hearts on the skerry, as he was a fisherman second to none in the whole world.

'We were just talking of the herring on the West Coast, when you arrived and interrupted us,' said Marie in conclusion of the ceremony.

Borg took no notice of the lie and allowed the dangerous 'interrupted' and the aggressive 'all hearts' to pass in silence, while he shook hands with the young giant of about twenty

years. The young man who was anything but an adept in the art of dissimulation seized the proffered hand with the air of a criminal and murmured a few unintelligible words.

At this juncture the old lady re-appeared, shook hands with her son-in-law and began to clear the table.

Conversation soon became lively. Marie made fun of her fiancé's clothes, probably in the hope of being supported by the stranger.

'Your veil, you know, is delicious,' she laughed. 'You ought to carry a sunshade when you are sitting at the helm.'

'All in good time, all in good time,' replied Borg, concealing his displeasure at being made fun of before a subordinate and a stranger.

The assistant had evidently already formed a poor opinion of his all-too-considerate chief, but he could not suppress a feeling of discomfort as he watched the cruel treatment which the latter received from his fiancée. A tactless compassion welled up in his heart, as his long fingers touched the veil which Axel Borg had wound round his hat.

'But it's very practical, no doubt!' he said. And immediately resuming the caressing tone which he had used from the start, he added :

'And if Miss Marie were as careful of her exquisite complexion . . .'

'As you are of your beautiful hands!' The words had slipped from the girl's tongue as she touched the man's hand which was resting on the table, kneading bread-bullets.

She had regained the mood which had possessed her during the whole morning.

Borg felt at a disadvantage, like a man who eats his dinner in the presence of people who have finished, and it necessitated the exertion of his whole will-power to overcome the depressing effect which the conversation had on him. 'They're already admiring each other's physical charms in my presence,' he thought, disgusted. But he realised that if he gave the slightest sign of annoyance at this want of good breeding, his game would be lost; his criticism would at once be stamped with the name of that base vice which they had mentioned a short time ago.

'You really have an unusually fine hand, a hand which speaks of intelligence,' he said, examining with the air of a connoisseur the object of his fiancée's admiration.

She had not in the least desired his acquiescence; she made a side-leap, and tried to deal his apparent stupidity another blow.

'How can you talk of intelligent hands!' she exclaimed with a silly little laugh.

'I said hands which speak of intelligence.'

'Oh! you philosopher!' scoffed the girl. 'While you were dreaming we have eaten all the radishes.'

'I am glad to think that Mr Blom has had a good dinner, and it gives me great pleasure to see that you have anticipated me taking charge of his welfare,' replied Borg, unceremoniously. 'Allow me to welcome you, Mr Blom; I hope that you will enjoy your stay here in the wilderness. I'll leave you in Miss Marie's care. She will give you all the preliminary information on fishing, while I go upstairs and take a rest.' He turned to the girl. 'Good-bye, sweetheart,' he said, 'take the young man in hand and guide him on to the right path. Good-bye, little mother!' he seized the hand of the lady and kissed it.

His exit was unexpected, but the legitimate excuse advanced by him admitted of no contradiction, and did not leave a trace of unpleasantness behind. In addition it gave him the much begrudged advantage of the last word.

Upstairs, in his room, he had hardly had time for a feeling of surprise at the incredible skill in the art of dissimulation, the ease in suppressing unpleasant sensations and hardening his heart with which 'the fear of losing her' had endowed him, when he found himself stretched out on the sofa with the rug drawn

over his head, on the point of sinking into a dreamless sleep.

When he awoke a few hours later, he rose with the firm resolve of breaking off his engagement with Marie.

The strongest tie which bound them together was habit, and habit, therefore, must work his release. But the void which his desertion would leave in her soul, must first be filled by another. And it should be he who seemed to have inflamed her senses from the first minute of their meeting.

He got no further. A knock at the door interrupted his thoughts.

It was the preacher. He entered with many apologies, embarrassed, and hardly knowing how to proffer his request.

'Have you noticed, sir,' he began, 'that the natives are not over-scrupulous?'

'I've known that for a long time,' answered Borg. 'What's up now?'

'The workmen complain that timber has been stolen from the chapel and that they haven't enough to go on with.'

'I'm not surprised. But what can I do?'

'You supplied what was necessary, sir.'

'Oh! that's it! But I regretted it directly I saw that your sermons enticed the people away from their work and, indirectly, made thieves of them.'



'You can't bring a direct charge . . .

'No! That's why I bring an indirect one. But if you want money, you must go elsewhere. Tell me one thing though. Who is this new assistant?'

'They say he's been a naval cadet; his father is very wealthy, they say, and he's here to learn fishing.'

At the opening of the conversation Borg had sat down near the window; he was watching Marie and the assistant playing at ball. He noticed that every time she threw back her shoulders to catch the ball, her skirt kicked up in front. The next time it happened he saw the assistant bending down with a laugh and making signs to her plainly conveying that he could see more than she thought.

'Don't you think,' recommenced Borg, 'that a shop would be of great advantage to the people? They would no longer have to row to town to make their purchases. And perhaps the shop-keeper could give them credit if he sold their fish? What do you say, Mr. Olsson?'

The preacher stroked his long beard; desire and indecision swept across his countenance.

From his window Borg saw the assistant climbing the look-out while Marie stood below, clapping her hands.

'A shop couldn't be anything but a boon, Mr Olsson.'

'I don't think the community would permit it unless, indeed, a reliable shop-keeper could be found; I mean to say a man who . . .'

'We'll choose a spiritually minded man and devote part of the profits to the chapel funds; then we shall have the community as well as the Foundation on our side.'

The preacher's face beamed.

'In this way we might succeed.'

'Think it over and try to find a suitable man who wouldn't cheat the people and would refuse to defraud the church. Think it over! And now, another thing. I've noticed a good deal of immorality among the people. Have you seen, Mr Olsson, or do you suspect what is going on down below, at Vestman's?'

'People say there's something wrong there, but who can tell? I don't see how anybody could interfere.'

'Don't you? But I wonder whether it hadn't better be stopped before they give themselves away. That sort of thing ends badly out here.'

The preacher did not appear to be inclined to take the matter up; either he did not think it worth while, or he did not want to quarrel with the people. Moreover, to judge by his

unhealthy appearance, he seemed preoccupied with some private trouble. He made up his mind suddenly and came out with his request.

'I wanted to ask you, sir, if you couldn't give me something; the damp out here has given me ague.'

'Ague? Let me see!'

In obedience to a sudden inspiration and without forgetting for a moment that he was dealing with an enemy who had challenged him, Borg felt the pulse of the patient, examined the tongue and the white of his eyes; then he gave his opinion.

'They feed you badly at Oeman's?'

'Yes, the food's wretched,' answered the preacher.

'You are suffering from starvation, and in future you shall have your dinner from my table. Are you an abstainer?'

'That's to say—I take beer . . .'

'Here's a preparation of quinine, to begin with; take it three times a day; when you've finished the bottle come and tell me.'

He gave him a bottle of quinine wine and added, taking his hand :

'You mustn't hate me, Mr Olsson; we have great mutual interests, although our methods differ. If I can be of service to you, let me know.'

• So simple a means, the semblance of a little kindness was sufficient to blind the preacher to such an extent that he thought he had found a friend. Sincerely moved, he shook Borg's hand and stammered :

'Once upon a time you did me a wrong, but God has turned it to good. Thank you, sir, for all your kindness; and please, don't forget about the shop.'

'You may be sure I won't forget it,' said Borg, dismissing him.

When Borg came downstairs to look for the assistant, he found him giving Marie a lesson in fencing, and evidently taking great trouble in trying to get sufficient elasticity into the girl's wrist and upper arm to ensure a pretty posture of defence.

Borg, after a few flattering remarks, apologised for disturbing them; but he wanted to talk to the assistant about his lodging.

'The only available room on the whole skerry is the attic above the ladies' room,' he said, boldly, as if he had used every effort to find him a room.

'That's impossible!' exclaimed Marie.

'Why?' contradicted Borg. 'Why should it be impossible? There's no other room, unless Mr Blom takes mine. But then I should have to live in the ladies' cottage and that's obviously impossible.'

Since there was no alternative, the matter was decided there and then, and the luggage carried upstairs.

'But now let's talk business,' continued Borg, as soon as the assistant had installed himself. 'The strömming has come. In a week's time fishing will begin. Therefore you must be off, Blom, to-night, if possible, while the wind is blowing from this quarter and see what you can do with the drift nets.'

'May I go too?' asked Marie, imitating the pitiful wail of a little child.

'Certainly, my love, why not?' said Borg, 'that is if Mr Blom's agreeable. But you must excuse me if I leave you alone now; I must write the reports. You must be out at sea by one o'clock. Take the coffee kettle with you.'

'Oh! what fun! what fun!' laughed the delighted girl, who seemed to have grown ten years younger.

'I'll go and see that the boats and nets are being got ready. Go to bed early, so that you won't oversleep yourself.'

And he went, surprised at the extraordinary ease with which he carried his points, since he had given up an impossible defence and proceeded to the attack.

For the first time he entered the cottage of the inimical Oemans.

• It did not escape him that he was greeted with coldness and dislike. But he asked such direct questions, gave such definite orders, that no one dared to oppose him. He said a few kind words about the children, prophesied better times for all the skerry, took all responsibility on his own shoulders, said a word or two about the shop, warned the people to have barrels and salt in readiness, and told them that if they had no money to buy them, they could have a loan.

He left, the friend of everybody, and Oeman extracted a promise of some strong cough drops.

From Oeman's cottage he went down to the sheds and selected a number of nets with stiff floats and strong ropes. He carefully examined the best boat and engaged two powerful rowers.

By the time all these preparations were completed, the supper bell went in the ladies' cottage.

During supper he talked to the mother, while the young people, as he called them, were absorbed in teasing and devouring each other with the eyes, as if they were unable to resist the mutual attraction of their bodies.

'Are you going to leave those two alone together?' whispered the mother.

'Why not? If I get angry, I shall make myself ridiculous, if I don't . . .'

'You'll make yourself more ridiculous!'

'Very well, in any case then! It doesn't matter what I do! Good night, mother.'

## CHAPTER XV

AFTER the first attempt with the drift net it had rained for a week.

The only result of the excursion had been a little scene between the fiancés. Borg had purposely played a trick upon the young people, for he was well aware that not a fish was to be caught. As he met the unsuccessful expedition at the shore, his fiancée, haggard with her vigil, called him an idiot. The boatmen grinned and the assistant, dreading a quarrel, made a joke of the whole affair.

At dinner the nagging about the new method of fishing had re-commenced; Borg had pretended to be so overwhelmed with remorse that Mr Blom had repeatedly taken his part and defended him in a very tactless manner.

The rainy days had kept the party indoors. A relationship of great intimacy had sprung up in the ladies' cottage. The assistant had introduced the custom of reading aloud from Swedish poets. At first Borg had been one of the audience, but finally he had stayed away



on the plea that Swedish literature was only fit for women and candidates for confirmation, and that he preferred to wait for a poet who wrote for men. He was unanimously pronounced unable to appreciate poetry; but he was well content; henceforth he was exempt from the readings.

The rainy weather had also interrupted the work at the chapel.

The workmen sat in the cottages and treated their hosts with brandy, in exchange for coffee.

The preacher, unable to hold any meetings on the hill, visited at first kitchen after kitchen, attempting to read to the people. But he was received with indifference, and he quarrelled with the men from the town who were for the most part free-thinkers. Ultimately he remained in his room, pleading sickness, and sent to Borg for another bottle of quinine as the first one was finished. All of a sudden he disappeared, and a rumour went round the skerry that he had left by the steamer for the mainland.

After a few days he returned in the company of a man he called brother; they brought with them a miscellaneous cargo. This cargo, the greater part of which consisted of beer, was stored in a sea-booth. Two barrels were placed in the open door, and a board laid

across; this represented the counter. And so the shop was opened, the community having given permission.

For some little time there had been a steady invasion of the fishing population of the islands nearer to the mainland. All the booths were opened and let to the strangers. The cottages were crowded with friends and relations. The life and animation which prevailed everywhere formed a strange contrast to the usual silence and desolation.

As the skerry and the right of fishing in the shallows belonged to a private individual in the North, each boat paid a certain duty, collected by an official appointed by the owner. A coolness had sprung up between the Superintendent and this man at the moment the former had mentioned fishing with drift nets. For in this case the fishermen would abandon the shallows and no longer pay the water-shilling.

But Borg had known how to turn even this, apparently unfavourable, circumstance to his advantage: the official who from dislike of innovations made propaganda for the good old customs, supported by liberal oblations of brandy, should be compelled to form the dark back-ground against which the new method should stand out all the more brilliantly. Borg was certain of victory; he had made water

tests at all hours of the day and night; he had worked with his dredge and examined the depths with his sea-glass in order to find out where the strömming was most abundant.

All these details had no other object than that of keeping him in training for future battles, restoring to him the feeling of authority; essential to all those who possess genius; talents which are allowed to lie fallow are soon lost.

The increasing insolence of the two young people had accustomed Borg to play the part of the vanquished. He was on the point of actually becoming the part he played, more especially as he did not wish to bring about the rupture but judged it wiser that the decisive step should be taken by the other side.

The young couple were in every respect in perfect sympathy. Borg had daily evidence that the mature woman stood on the same mental level as the immature man; she accepted all his unripe ideas, his crude opinions, as the acme of wisdom. Borg's attempts to prevent acts of folly were invariably wrecked by the inability of both Marie and the assistant to see a question from more than one side. They were completely under the spell of their desire to possess each other. He had no wish to compete in gymnastics, or in composing pane-

gyrics on the inferior sex; it suited his game to be cut out; it would end a connexion which threatened to ruin his whole future. He was painfully conscious of the anomalous relationship whenever he spent a few undisturbed hours in his fiancée's society; on those occasions he saw nothing but reflections of his rival; felt his breath on her lips, as it were; heard her re-echo his inanities. He loathed this relationship, reminiscent of a *ménage à trois*.

The vanity of the assistant was without limits; he believed himself head and shoulders above the superintendent because he was on a level with Miss Marie, who on her part tried to hypnotise people into the belief that she excelled Borg. According to the formula : if A is greater than B, and C is as great as A, then C, too, is greater than B, he was right. But he never thought of examining first whether A really was greater than B.

It would have been impossible, so Borg thought, to find a more complete revelation of the secret of youth. He recognised a stage in his evolution which he had left far behind. How he had wept with ambition and desire ! How envy of his elders who had won what he was still striving for and now kept him down, had filled him with despair ! How he had

sympathised with all those who were oppressed and of no importance ! What monstrous inability to gauge one's own strength was betrayed by the yearning to grasp in a moment what only a life-time could bestow ! What a mountain of sentimentality which was nothing but unsatisfied desire ! What an exaggerated opinion of women, because nursery and mother were still fresh in the memory !

He even recognised the attempts to come to a better understanding ; attempts of the fox to succeed through cunning, resembling the notorious cunning of women, priests and lawyers.

The young man had tried thought-reading with the superintendent, betraying thereby that he gave him credit for mysterious knowledge which would explain the difference between him and other men. But he had been so clumsy in his method that he had let out what the ladies thought and said about him. Instead of giving him the smallest enlightenment, Borg had mystified him by his answers, so that he began to wonder whether his chief was a fool or a demon. By demon he meant a man conscious of his power, who under the cloak of simplicity, acted with great shrewdness, was always wide awake, and influenced the lives of others, so that they should serve his own ends. And as shrewdness, which is

a virtue, is in discredit with the young who cannot foresee the consequences of an act, the assistant's envy showed itself in the passionate desire of the inferior mind to drag down what it cannot comprehend, and trample it under foot.

This was the state of affairs when the great day dawned which was to decide the fate of the natives during the coming winter.

A sultry August evening brooded over the skerry; the sun had set but cliffs and stones were warm, so warm that no dew had as yet fallen. The sea was smooth and grey as lavender. A coppery full moon was rising and was just now half hidden by a brig steering, apparently, straight for the satellite's *mare serenitatis*. The floats lay in rows on the shore, looking like flocks of sea-birds rocking themselves on the swell.

The people, armed with coffee kettles and brandy bottles, were lying round camp fires, awaiting the dawn to examine their nets.

In the booth, where beer was being sold, business was very brisk, and the preacher was lending a hand; he wore a blue apron and opened beer bottles with the skill of an old inn-keeper.

Borg had observed current, temperature and barometer, and was now strolling along the

sandy shore to rest his brain. Every now and then he came upon a couple who had sought solitude. Their conduct was so incredibly naive that he turned away with a contemptuous smile. When he had reached the headland, he climbed on the cliff to find his favourite seat. It was a stone chair, smoothly polished by the waves, and after the scorching sunshine of the day still hot as an oven.

He had been sitting there for a little while, lulled into drowsiness by the sighing waves, when he heard a crunching of sand and a rattling of the dry sea-weed. The assistant and his fiancée were strolling along the shore with their arms round each other. They stood still between the invisible observer and the shining path of moonlight which lay on the water. He saw their silhouettes as distinctly as if he were examining them between lens and reflector of his microscope. With the keen eye of antipathy he saw her bird-of-prey profile approaching the gorilla head of her companion, with its huge trumpeter's cheeks and the cone-shaped narrow skull which possessed no forehead. He noticed the man's fleshy figure, the ignoble lines and large feminine hips, reminiscent of the Farnese Hercules: an ideal man of a semi-human period, when the

first ruled because the cerebrum had not been completely evolved.

He was deeply wounded. It was as if he had formed a union with a female centaur, as if his soul had entered into a relationship with a deteriorated type. A crime might debase his family for all time; he might sacrifice his life for another man's child; waste his love on the offspring of a stranger; and if he should take this child to his heart, he would have to carry with him his humiliation as if it were a leaden weight forged to his ankle, without ever being able to free himself.

Jealousy, this 'base vice,' what was it but the fear of the healthy, strong sexual instinct of being checked in its praiseworthy egoistic desire to carry on all that was best in the individual? And was not every individual endowed with this healthy passion? It was not merely a characteristic of the sterile maintainer of a family, the weak fool, the Cicisbeo, the gynolatrists, believing in Platonic love.

Borg was jealous. But his resentment gradually abated and finally gave way to an irresistible desire to possess this girl without marrying her. War had been declared, the freedom of choice had been proclaimed. What if he took up the glove, tore his bonds and appeared as a lover? The battle won, he



could go his way in peace, serene in the consciousness that he was not one of nature's failures, destined to be beaten in the struggle for love. It was no longer a case of an honest competition; it was a treacherous duel between burglars; the challenger's weapon was a jemmy; they fought for stolen goods. The prize was a woman; all scruples had vanished. The beast was roused; the savage instincts, concealing themselves under the sacred name of love, raged like natural forces let loose.

He left his cliff unperceived and went home to arrange his fate.

On the following morning at seven o'clock dead silence reigned on the skerry; as the superintendent had predicted, the catch in the shallows had been a failure. The men were sitting in their boats, despondent, straightening their nets from which they picked a solitary strömme every now and then and threw it on the shore.

With the sinking credit the traffic before the shop had ceased. The preacher had taken off his blue apron and, bible in hand, had gathered round him a handful of despairing women in one of the cottages.

With the extraordinary logic which is not at all uncommon among his class, he related how Jesus had fed five thousand people with

five loaves and two fishes. It was easy to draw a parallel, for there were many mouths and few fish on the skerry; but how all these mouths were to be filled, he could not tell. He was unable to help; consequently he had to explain how it was that the miracle could not happen again. It was want of faith. If their faith were but the size of a mustard seed, the miracle would be repeated. Faith was the reward of prayer. Let them join him in prayer.

None of the women present believed in the miracle of the two fishes; they had never heard or read about it; nevertheless they followed the preacher's example and recited with him the Lord's prayer, which they had learnt fairly well when they were candidates for confirmation.

When they were half way through, they were interrupted by the murmur of many voices on the shore. Those who were nearest to the window saw a fishing boat lowering her square sail and coming alongside the landing stage.

Miss Marie stood in the bow, her blue tam-o'-shanter perched on her head, her hair fluttering in the wind. The assistant sat at the helm and signalled with his hat that they had been successful. The boat was laden with

nets. Through the dark meshes glittered fish on fish.

'Come along, all of you !' exclaimed the girl, with the generosity of the conqueror, 'we've plenty of strömming for everybody.'

'The people may have it as soon as I have measured it,' interposed the Superintendent who had watched the return of the boat from his window, and had come down to the shore to see the result of his work.

'What do you want to measure it for ?' asked Miss Marie, superciliously.

'For the statistics, Your High-and-Mightiness,' replied the Superintendent without a trace of anger; he knew that the successful catch was due to his information on current, depth, temperature of the water, and the condition of the bottom of the sea.

'Oh ! You and your statistics !' laughed Marie, contemptuously.

'Do as you like, then, but let me know later on how much it was.' And without another word Borg returned to his room.

Marie turned to the assistant. 'He's envious,' she said.

'Jealous ?' suggested the assistant.

'He hasn't got it in him,' answered the girl, under her breath. Her fiancé's indifference to his rival had been a source of irritation to her

for days; she read in it a positively insulting faith in his power of retaining her affection.

The prayer meeting had been interrupted; the natives were congregating round the fishing boat.

'Really, the young lady is a splendid fellow!' flattered the preacher, seizing the opportunity, as he thought, to sow the seeds of discord.

'A sitting crow gets no food,' laughed the inspector.

'He means one who lies on the sofa,' whispered the assistant in Marie's ear.

The girl seemed to swell with pride and freely distributed the fish among the people on the landing stage, who never ceased calling down blessings on their good angel.

But these fine emotions were not so much born of gratitude for benefits received, as unwillingness on the part of the people to admit that they had been wrong and the Superintendent, at whose method they had scoffed, right.

It was the reverse of the hatred they nursed for their real benefactor to whom they would not give thanks.

When the fish had been taken out of the nets and distributed among the very poor, it filled ten barrels. They were at once bought up by

the shop to be pickled and the money was spent on the spot on coffee, sugar and beer. After Miss Marie had explained the new method in detail, no one doubted that it would be easy to catch sufficient strömming for home consumption during the winter.

## CHAPTER XVI

BORG found a letter in his room which had been brought by a Customs official. The officers of the corvette *Loke*, which was to anchor close to the skerry at eight o'clock that night, were inviting him and his fiancée to a dance.

He realised that the moment for the rupture had come; it was impossible to introduce another man's mistress as his future wife. He slipped off his engagement ring and enclosed it in a letter, written on the previous evening and addressed to Marie's mother. In it he expressed in the strongest terms his despair at having to abandon all hope of making Marie his wife; a previous reckless entanglement had culminated in the birth of a child; the baby's mother was legally entitled to claim his assistance; and although she could not compel him to marry her, the matter would stand in the way of his forming any other alliance. As a man of honour he was bound to stand by the victim of his passion, shield her from disgrace and save her from want.

This fictitious story seemed to him the only possible way of breaking off his engagement. The reputation of both of them, more particularly the girl's, remained uncompromised; moreover it was final and left no hope of a reconciliation.

He sealed the letter, whistled for his orderly and gave it to him with instructions to deliver it to the old lady.

When the man had gone, he lighted a cigarette and took a seat near the window to watch the effect of his strategy.

The old lady was standing in the porch, shaking a rug, when the messenger arrived with the letter. She seemed a little surprised, and her surprise grew when she felt the envelope with her left hand to ascertain its contents. Then she turned round and went into the cottage.

A moment later he saw Marie's figure behind the curtain. She was pacing the room excitedly, standing still every now and then and gesticulating wildly, evidently trying to clear herself of a charge.

This continued for about an hour. Then she came out, threw a revengeful glance at Borg's window, and beckoned to the assistant who was coming up from the harbour.

Both re-entered the cottage and remained

invisible for half an hour; suddenly they reappeared and went to a wooden shed from which they produced a trunk and a portmanteau.

It was obvious that they had come to a decision, and realised that they could stay no longer on the skerry.

After a little while the assistant emerged by himself; this time he fetched his own portmanteau which Borg recognised by its brass mounts.

So he, too, meant to leave.

Presently landlord and servants arrived on the scene; the whole house seemed to be turned upside down.

Borg whiled away the next few hours with a book. Towards noon he saw Marie and the assistant coming out of the cottage. They were in the middle of a lively conversation which grew more and more lively as it proceeded, and was accompanied by gestures which plainly betrayed the fact that they were squabbling.

'They're already quarrelling,' thought Borg.

In the afternoon the pilot's boat took the old lady and the assistant to the town-bound steamer. Borg could not understand why Marie remained behind. Perhaps she nursed



a faint hope of reconciliation, perhaps she wanted to defy him, perhaps something else was in her mind.

She was sitting in the window in a place where he could see her from his room. She remained there nearly the whole time, now drumming on the window panes, now taking up a book, now burying her face in her handkerchief.

At seven o'clock in the evening the corvette appeared on the fairway from Landsort, and soon after she cast anchor among the skerries. When she signalled with her steam-whistle to the pilot, the girl rose and went outside to see what was the matter.

Borg watched her as she stood on the hill, gazing with fascinated eyes at the trim vessel with its large tent between decks, decorated with bunting. Her hands crossed behind her back, she looked the picture of unhappiness. Now the breeze wafted the first bars of a march to her ears. Her feet began to move in time; slowly her slim body bent forward, as if drawn by the spell of the music. But all of a sudden she collapsed, covered her face with her hands, and rushed back to the cottage in despair, like a child robbed of an expected treat.

Axel Borg dressed for the dance. He put

on his six orders and the bangle which he had not worn since the day of his engagement.

When he had finished dressing and found that he had still an hour to spare before the boat would come for him, he resolved to call on Marie and bid her a last farewell. He did not want to be thought a coward, and also, he wanted to test his power of controlling his emotions.

He entered the hall a little noisily, so as to give her time for a pose which should allow him to guess why she had remained behind and what were her intentions.

He knocked at the door and entered. Marie was sewing; he had never seen her occupied in this way before. Her face expressed contrition, remorse and humility, in spite of her effort to look indifferent.

'May I come in, Miss Marie, or shall I go?' asked Borg.

Once more he felt that inexplicable yearning to raise her above himself as his wife, a yearning he always felt whenever she came to him invested with womanly characteristics and the desire to lean on him just as he always experienced an uncontrollable desire to strike her down whenever she put forth a man's claims with the demeanour of a man. At this moment she appeared to him more beautiful

than he had seen her for a long time; he gave<sup>o</sup> way to his feelings and spoke to her, frankly :

‘I’ve hurt you, Miss Marie . . .’

At his gentle words she straightened herself and answered venomously :

‘But you were too great a coward to tell me so to my face !’

‘Too considerate, Miss Marie ! I don’t find it as easy as you do to give people a slap in the face. And, as you see, I have the courage to come and see you, just as you have the courage to receive me.’

There was an intentional double meaning in his words; he wanted to see whether she had taken his story seriously.

‘Did you think I should be afraid of you?’ she asked, digging her needle into the material.

‘I couldn’t tell how you would receive my explanations, although I felt convinced that you wouldn’t be inconsolable.’

The word inconsolable irritated her; it seemed to hint, at the youthful consoler. But neither of them was inclined to give away the game. Borg was afraid to appear jealous; Marie wondered whether he had seen anything.

Up to the present she had been bending over her work; as she looked up, now, to read her opponent’s face, she noticed with amazement

the row of orders on the revers of his dress coat.

'How smart you are !' she said, with childish malice, trying to conceal her envy.

'I'm going to the dance.'

The girl winced. Her face was convulsed; Borg felt the reflex of her pain and seized her hand as she burst into passionate sobbing. As he stooped down to her, she hid her face on his shoulder; her whole body shook with weeping.

'Oh, you great baby !' said Borg.

'I know I'm a baby. Therefore you should be lenient with me,' sobbed the girl.

'Tell me—how far should leniency go?'

'It should be without limits.'

'Indeed, it shouldn't ! There's a quite definite border line, where wilfulness comes very near to crime.'

'What do you mean?'

'You know what I mean ! I can see that very plainly,' replied Borg. The spell was broken; she had grown hard, and when she was hard, she was plain.

'So you are jealous,' she said tauntingly. She was under the impression that she had re-captured him.

'No; jealousy is either an unjustifiable distrust or a precautionary measure; my fears were well-founded. Jealousy is therefore not the right word.'

'And of a boy! A puppy who is so far beneath you,' continued the girl, paying no heed to his explanation.

'All the more disgrace to you!'

'And so your whole story was untrue?' she remarked, casually, ignoring the disgrace.

'From beginning to end! But I didn't want to hurt your mother and disgrace you! Do you realise my delicacy?'

'Yes, I realise it! But I don't understand myself.'

'Tell me what's happened in the past, and I'll help you to an understanding.'

'In the past? What do you mean?'

'There is a past, then; I always thought so.'

'You permit yourself insinuations . . .'

'As it no longer concerns me who you are or what you have been . . .' He caught sight of the gunner who was coming to fetch him crossing the hill, and interrupted himself. 'I must say good-bye now.'

'Don't leave me yet,' pleaded the girl, seizing his hand and looking at him with despairing eyes. 'Don't leave me! I don't know what I shall do if you go.'

'Why torment each other since we must part?'

'We won't torment each other! You shall stay with me this evening; I will tell you all

you want to know; then you will judge me differently.'

These words told Borg everything. He no longer doubted he had escaped the misfortune of marrying another man's, or perhaps many men's, mistress. His decision was taken.

He went to the window and told the gunner he would come later on in his own boat.

Then he returned to the sofa and tried to re-start the conversation.

But, relieved of her anxiety, the girl had broken down; she became more and more taciturn and finally relapsed into complete silence. They had nothing to say and were so weighed down by the fear of raising a storm, that they both became depressed and bored.

Borg looked at the books which were still lying on the table; his eye fell on a volume which bore the name of the assistant.

'The story of a young girl, I believe. Have you read it?'

'No, I haven't had time. Is it worth reading?'

'It's an unusual book; its author is a woman and yet it is sincere.'

'Indeed! What is it about?'

'It preaches free love. A young savant is engaged to a girl without prejudices. While he is away on an expedition, she gives herself to an artist; later on she marries her fiancé.'

'Well, and what does the author say to it?'

'She laughs, of course.'

'Disgusting!' said the girl, getting up to fetch a bottle of wine.

'Why? Love knows of no right of possession. Moreover, the fiancé was dull, at least in her society, if the book is to be believed.'

'And we, too, are beginning to be dull,' interrupted Marie, filling the glasses.

'What is there to talk about?' asked the lover, with a cynical smile which could not be misunderstood. 'Come and sit by me.'

Instead of feeling offended by the brutal tone and coarse gesture with which he accompanied his invitation, the girl looked admiringly at the man whom she had hitherto almost despised on account of his respectful demeanour.

It had grown dusk. The waning moon threw a path of greenish light on the floor, sharply silhouetting the pot of balsam.

Through the open window came the muffled sounds of the first waltz, *Queen of the Ball*, like a reproach, a greeting from a lost paradise, and, perhaps, a suggestion that all was not yet over. In the hope of binding him to her by the memory of supreme happiness, she gave herself to him, and he passionately told his love.

## CHAPTER XVII

THREE days later the Superintendent of Fisheries, who had spent a little time at Dalarö, returned to the East Skerry.

When he heard that Miss Marie had left for good, he felt inexpressibly relieved; it was as if the atmosphere had become clearer and more rarified.

As soon as he entered his room, he opened the window and threw himself on the sofa, to smoke a cigarette and recapitulate the events of the last few days.

When he had torn himself from Marie's arms at midnight, he had climbed into his boat with the satisfaction of a man who has fulfilled a pressing duty. The equilibrium of his soul was re-established. An offence against his rights had been committed in a case where the law gave him no redress. He had been compelled to take the law into his own hand, and he had only acted in accordance with the principles preached by his opponents.

On board the corvette where he met men to whom he could speak in the language of the



cultured, he had felt like a man intoxicated. He discussed scientific subjects with the doctor; no need now to debase his brain-power and talk down; no need to be semi-idiotic to make his meaning plain; insinuations and nuances were understood at once.

He realised that for the last three months he had lived in a state of barbarism which had involved him gradually and imperceptibly in petty quarrels; had made his intellectual life second to his sexual and emotional life; had raised retribution to a matter of prime importance and beguiled him into a breeding-competition in which he had won the prize. Now he understood why the representatives of the Christian church, who carry civilisation to savage tribes, are not permitted to found a family, bind themselves to wife and children. He realised that there was virtue in fasting and resignation whenever men desired to live a higher, spiritual life. It was not for the sake of peace that the hermit sought solitude. Just as a single grain of wheat, accidentally fallen on fallow land, may shoot out into sixty ears, while a grain sown in a ploughed field, surrounded by a million others, will only yield two, so also an individual, striving to reach a higher development, can only thrive in the desert.

The experiences of the last three days proved this. Dragged from circle to circle, both on the corvette and at Dalarö, he noticed night after night, as he went to bed, that his corners were fast being rubbed off. Like a diamond, he gained in appearance, but lost in weight. He had been compelled to make so many cowardly concessions, called forth by a general sympathy with all mankind and the instinct of adaptation, that the views then improvised by him on the spur of the moment, now obtruded themselves upon his memory, claiming to be his inmost thoughts. On the third day, weary of it all, he had looked upon himself as a humbug, saying one thing and thinking another. He was ashamed of himself; he lost his self-respect in the same degree as he gained the respect of his fellow-men, who were delighted at his affability.

If he wanted to avoid sinking, he must isolate himself; the solitude now regained affected his spirit like a vapour bath or a swim in the sea; he was free from pressure; contact with concrete matter had ceased.

He resolved to remain on the skerry during the winter.

His decision taken, he rented the cottage in which Marie and her mother had spent the summer, and immediately began to remove his

things. He converted the larger of the rooms into his study and laboratory, the other one into his dining- and drawing-room; he would sleep in the attic.

When he awoke on the following morning after a dreamless sleep, he found comfort in the idea that he was inhabiting a whole house by himself. No further risk of suggestions forced on him by the voices of strangers, no further danger of receiving impressions other than those of his own seeking.

He breakfasted and went into his study after having given orders that nobody was to be admitted before three o'clock.

He had plenty of leisure now to carry out a plan of many years' standing; he would study the ethnography of modern Europe without making tedious journeys. On printed circulars, drawn up on behalf of a fictitious firm, he wrote the names and addresses of a number of tradesmen and put them into stamped envelopes.

He was anxious to collect information, as complete as possible, on the measurement of skulls and bodies, and had calculated that circulars to hat manufacturers, undertakers, shirt-makers and hosiers in the principal towns of Europe would furnish him with the desired knowledge. These circulars contained the re-

quest to acquaint him with the sizes mostly in demand at home and abroad.

A second circular was sent to all the booksellers in the capitals as well as the smaller European towns, begging them to send him photographs of all descriptions, at the highest price, the cost to be collected by the post office. He was also in communication with a man who bought up photographs for the sake of the silver.

In addition he had thousands of portraits cut out of foreign illustrated magazines.

This material seemed sufficient to him to start on.

It was noon when he had finished his work. As he went out he noticed a letter in his letter box. The hand-writing was familiar. When he had made sure that it was from Marie, he laid it unopened on the table while he hastily ate his simple dinner. It was sure to contain something unpleasant, for he had broken his promise to return on the following day to say good-bye to her. Determined to save himself annoyance, he pushed it, unopened, into a drawer.

When he awoke from his afternoon nap, the fever of industry had cooled down; his thoughts, no longer wandering to the books, were irresistibly attracted to the drawer. He

paced the room, battling with himself, a prey to indecision. The drawer seemed to contain a part of her soul. Her spirit was in the room; the white envelope on which the red seal shone like a kiss, was charged with the power of her fascination. He saw her sitting on the sofa, heard her whispered words, felt her eyes glowing in the dusk, and his flesh began to burn.

‘What a fool I was,’ he thought, ‘to let life’s greatest happiness slip out of my hands. Since love is a mutual deception, why not let oneself be deceived? Nothing for nothing! And as there is no perfect happiness in the world, why not be content with imperfect happiness?’

He wished he had crawled to her, lied to her that he was her slave; admitted that she had beaten him in the struggle. He could have sent his rival flying. Alone with her, completely at one, he could have bound her to him so firmly with the bond of habit and interest, that she would never have dreamt of seeking love in the arms of another.

His heart shrank with fear : the letter might rob him of the last shred of hope. He would not read it. Sitting at his laboratory table, without realising what he was doing, he opened an iron retort, pushed the fateful missive in and lit the blowing-lamp. After a few

moments smoke issued from the neck. When it had cleared away he struck a match and held it to the gas. A small bluish-yellow flame shot up and burnt for a few minutes with a sound like the peeping of a bat.

The spirit of the letter, as an alchemist would have said! Burning paper, producing hydrogen and carbon, just as the burning soul in a living body. Carbon and hydrogen! That was all and everything.

The flame flickered, dwindled and crept back into the funnel. It was dark in the room.

Outside the sky had clouded over. The east wind lashed the waves and hurled them on the shore, sighing and hissing. The gale broke on the corner of the house as a wave breaks on the stern of a ship.

But above all those mournful sounds could be heard the shrieks of the bell-buoy outside, rhythmical as the recitation of a tragedian; pausing every now and then as if taking breath, or bent on letting the last groan die away completely before giving vent to another. It was a Titan's solo, accompanied by the gale, a gigantic organ, the east wind blowing the bellows.

The room felt stifling. He put on his overcoat and went out to face the storm; perhaps it would blow away his depression.

Against his will he was attracted by the light of a lamp in the shop. He walked towards it. As the fishing with the drift nets had been very profitable, business was unusually brisk. Hidden by the darkness he passed close by the gossiping fishermen without being seen.

'The assistant has taken the girl from him,' said old Oeman, 'she'll have a man, at any rate, instead of a . . .'

'Certainly he's unlike anybody else,' replied Vestman, the bachelor. 'He's written about a hundred letters to-day, which are to be sent off by post. No one can tell what he's doing and brewing. We'd better keep our eyes open, for we know what people are after when they lock themselves in.'

'Oh! rubbish!' exclaimed Vestman, the husband. 'Let him brew his own drop, if he likes! He's no worse than old Söderlund who mashed outside, on the cliffs, and lost his kettle. It's no affair of ours.'

'Well, if that were all,' insisted old Oeman, 'he could please himself. But I shan't forgive him for wanting to seize my draw net. And if ever I catch him by the fin, I shall not rest until I've thrown him into the fish-box.'

'He's a wicked man who doesn't believe in God,' said the preacher in conclusion. 'That's a certain fact.'

The superintendent had never expected gratitude, but he could not help a feeling of sadness. He was in a desert, surrounded by foes of a very dangerous type, who saw in him a madman or a criminal. They believed him to be distilling spirits to make sixpence a quart; they suspected him of being a poisoner. If any accident were to happen on the island, they would lay the blame on him. How could he venture to seize their illegal draw nets, when they would pay him out by bringing against him a more or less scandalous counter-charge? or, what might be even worse, take vengeance into their own hands?

They were a dangerous rabble, dangerous as stupidity.

He knew that he could make friends of them at any moment, by inviting them to a quart of brandy and drinking with them; but he did not entertain the thought for one moment. Their enmity ensured his freedom; their friendship would have dragged him down into their mud. Their hatred would have the effect of a rehomotor, even though there could never be any contact between their spirit and his. Danger had its use; it kept his mind awake and subtle, gave him something to fight against, something on which to whet his strength.



Moreover, there was less danger for him from the savages out here than from his equals among whom he had moved for a few days; they had far more power to harm him. The ship's doctor had looked at him with startled eyes when he suggested that some means should be found of making use of the enormous masses of free carbon, which are wasted in the manufacture of sulphuric acid, instead of importing the expensive saltpetre from Chili, to replace the waste of carbon in the soil. And when he added that the smoke from the chimneys might be utilised, the doctor had advised him to stay for a little while at a watering place and mix with other men.

It was better to remain here, in complete solitude, and be regarded by these Red-skins as a madman than to be sentenced to civil death by an infallible court of authorities made up of his peers.

For some time he wandered about in the darkness, but finally he retraced his foot steps and returned to the cottage. He lit the lamps and candles in both rooms and opened all the doors to get rid of the feeling of being shut in.

He looked at his watch; it was only eight o'clock. The long evening with the night beyond it frightened him; his brain was too fagged for work, but not tired enough for

•sleep. The moaning of the wind, the soughing of the waves, the shrieking of the buoy, made him feel nervous. To shut out all auditory suggestions, he placed two little sleep bullets into his ears. They were small steel bullets, bought in Germany, intended to prevent all sounds from penetrating to the brain.

As soon as he had switched off, perhaps, the most important channel of communication with the outer world, his imagination began to work at high pressure.

•An insane longing to know the contents of the destroyed letter seized him with such irresistible force, that he opened the retort and tried to read in the ashes. But the fire had burnt the ink, not a trace of the writing could be seen. Now the coast was clear for all manner of doubts and suppositions. At one moment he was quite certain that he could correctly gauge the contents of the letter from what had gone before; at the next he dismissed the idea, remembering that the girl thought and acted illogically.

Finally he gave it up and decided to dismiss the matter. But his brain had run away with him and brooded on its own account, grinding down and sifting, until he was worn out. Yet sleep remained as far off as ever; and as his brain-fag increased, the baser instincts began to stir.

Furious because his soul could not sustain the struggle with his frail body, he undressed, took a dose of bromide of potassium and went to bed.

The wild careering of his brain was arrested; his fancies grew dim, unconsciousness gradually stole over him and he sank into a leaden sleep.

## CHAPTER XVIII

AUTUMN was far advanced, yet the skerry bore no evidence that the summer was spent; no foliage trees with their changing tints reminded the spectator of the year's decline, and the lichen had only grown more succulent and luxurious as the moisture in the air increased. Heather and crow-berry had burst out afresh; the rain had washed junipers and dwarf-pines, the evergreen trees of the North, and cleansed them from dust.

As soon as the autumn fishing was over, the strangers had returned to their native islands. Once more silence brooded over the skerry. The shop was closed. The scaffolding of the chapel had almost entirely disappeared; the boards had been stolen and used for carpentering and firewood; only the posts were still standing, looking like a group of gallows.

The preacher rarely mixed with the people; since he had become a total abstainer, he had taken quinine wine in large quantities; he suffered from palpitation and a buzzing in the

ears, and during the greater part of the day he slept

After a month's work Axel Borg had recovered from the wound which his love affair had inflicted on his soul. Iodide of potassium and a low diet had stilled desire, and when the sorrow of solitude overwhelmed him, he found relief in nitrous oxide, which he manufactured himself from nitrate of ammonia. The idea of alcoholic intoxication was abhorrent to him, not merely on account of its vulgarity, but also because he knew that there follows in its wake a greater despondency, and often suicidal mania. In the beginning the curious gas had had a stimulating effect and had made him laugh; but the inane chuckle scattered his great thoughts and ambitions to the wind. He scoffed; but no sooner did he find himself among the scoffers who had laughed at him, than he yearned to rise again above himself; yearned for his sorrow and his pain.

When his isolation had become so complete that the servant was only allowed to straighten his rooms and bring in his meals while he remained locked up in his attic, memories of the summer began to haunt him. He remembered, without the slightest effort, every word that had been spoken.

The preacher's pursuit of him on that foggy

morning and his appearance on the cliff appeared to him as part of a deep-laid scheme. The man's words about him and his father, Marie's dark utterance that she knew who he was took root and began to grow. He felt sure that there was a secret in his life, known to everybody but himself.

It was not long before the preacher's presence presented itself to him in the light of an espionage, set on foot by his persecutors.

In calmer hours he knew that he was wrong. He was well aware that persecutorial mania is the first symptom of weakness following on isolation.

Humanity was a huge electric battery consisting of many elements; the isolated element immediately lost its power. The cylinder with its covering of copper wire became devitalised at the moment the soft iron bar was removed. He was on the point of becoming devitalised because his iron bar had grown hard as steel.

But this persecutorial mania, the result of physical weakness, had produced a re-action. Had he not actually been persecuted from the moment it became evident, at school, that he was a power, the first of a new species, ready to break away from his family and, like a differentiated plant, claim a new name which

would, perhaps, become the name of a whole new family? He had been persecuted, instinctively, by the inferiors from below and the mediocre from above. The latter sat in the assaying-office and determined the measure by which greatness should be gauged. They had hated and attacked him just as the yellow thoroughbred from the Canary Islands, escaping from its cage and straying among the siskins in the wood, is attacked on account of its gorgeous plumage which irritates the wild birds.

Nature, with whom he had always been in close communion, appeared dead to him, now, for the intermediary link, man, was no longer there. The sea which he had worshipped because it had seemed to him the only grand feature of his poor country with its petty summer-villa landscapes, was drawing in, in the same degree as his ego expanded. This blue, turpentine-green, grey circle shut him in like a prison yard; the monotonous little landscape made him suffer for the same reason that a prisoner's cell is said to torture its occupant: he lacked new impressions. Yet he could not face the idea of going away and leaving it all behind; he was rooted in the soil of his mother-country; in its little impressions, its regimen; he could not be transplanted with

his roots. It was the tragedy of the man from the north, expressing itself in his longing for the south.

He fell into the habit of brooding and inventing plans for connecting Sweden with the mainland. His country was really no more than a group of islands, although Lapland joined it to the Continent in the north. The capital of Denmark should become the centre of the north; an express train, travelling in six hours from Stockholm to Helsingborg, in connexion with a steamship-service across the Sound of Oere should ensure this. Open ports at Djurö and Nynäs in the Stockholm Archipelago, in connection with ice-breakers, should keep trade and navigation alive during the whole year. This would limit the northern hibernation and correct the national fault of unsteadiness for which this long interruption of all activity was usually blamed. The stream of Russian trade with England should flow through Stockholm and Göteborg, realising the dreams of Charles XI and Charles XII of trading with Persia and India via Russia and Sweden.

Sweden should become a country beloved by tourists, attracting crowds of foreigners. He would make a sea-side town of Stockholm by closing the two mouths of the Mälar on the



North-bridge and the sluice at Stockholm, and by a system of canals guide the lake from the Bay of Strengnäs through the Lake of Bofven into the sea near Trosa. This would bring the salt water right into the heart of the capital and have a salutary effect on the town and its inhabitants.

He thought of the time when Sweden, belonging to the great Catholic church, stood in direct communication with Rome, and was looked upon as a part of Europe, and dreamt of re-introducing the Catholic faith, if it were shown that some form of religion was essential to the great mass of the people. It was the faith of their fore-fathers which they had been compelled by fire and sword to forswear; he thought of its martyrs, Hans Brask, Olaus and Johannes Magnus, Nils Dracke and Ture Jönsson, so shamelessly vilified by history.

The Catholic faith, our Roman inheritance, the first upholder of the ideal of European citizenship, had marched through Europe like a conquering hero. Bismarck had been beaten in the struggle against the ascendancy of the Catholic church, had gone to Canossa and suggested the Pope as arbitrator, when he could no longer deny that arbitration was preferable to steel-guns. Denmark had built Catholic cathedrals and young Denmark had

put its pen into the service of the movement. The Teutonisation of the North and North Germany was a relapse into the barbarism of the period after the slaughters of 1870. Its consequences were the elimination of Latin, hatred of all things French and efforts to suppress French literature; a North-German family policy; a Lutheran inquisition and prisons for heretics; a general lowering of the standard of intelligence.

Lutherism, this was the enemy! A Teutonic civilisation, a middle-class religion in black trousers, the limitations of sectarianism, particularism, isolation, imprisonment, spiritual death.

No, there should be a united Europe; the people's path lay through Rome; the path of intelligence through Paris.

The Swedish peasant should again become a world-citizen and be delivered from his degraded condition; he should no longer be bereft of the glimmer of beauty which the older faith offers to the eyes and ears; his divine service should be a song of praise indeed, in the Roman tongue, written by poets and not by compilers of hymn-books. There was no need for him to understand anything but that which would awaken his loftiest conceptions of things he could not yet comprehend. Genuine priests

should read high-mass to him, men who devoted their lives to religion and the cure of souls, not men who were farmers and dairy-keepers, played cards and did all sorts of clerical work. Then the peasant's wife would have a spiritual guide to whom she could confide her troubles in the confessional, instead of gossiping about them with the servants in the pastor's kitchen.

If Latin were re-introduced, the dissertations of Swedish students could be read by the savants of Europe, and every Swedish scholar would realise his fellowship with the great spiritual community presided over by the pontificate at Paris.

These and other thoughts he wrote down on paper and laid them in his drawer; he was not in touch with any newspaper or magazine. The press would not print his ideas, least of all the patriotic press which 'from envy was disinclined to listen to any proposals for the advancement of the mother-country.'

The replies to his circulars had come in and his attic was littered with the material for his European Ethnography.

But by this time he had lost all interest in the matter. His soul was seriously sick; he had not the courage to go out; the sight of a human being filled him with repugnance and

he frequently retraced his steps rather than meet anybody. At the same time he felt a longing to hear the sound of his voice, discharge his over-productive brain by contact with a fellow-creature; feel the reaction of his individuality on another being, and have somebody to associate with.

He had a fleeting thought of buying a dog. But the transplanting of the off-shoots of his soul, his emotions, into the body of a brute seemed to him like grafting grapes on thistles. And he had never cared for dogs.

There was only one man on the skerry to whom he felt in the least attracted; this was Vestrian, the husband, whose wife had a lover without his knowing it. He was honest and intelligent. Axel Borg made friends with him by giving him a salmon line and hook. He had lent him books at the beginning of the summer and taught him to write. But when the fishing season began and navigation was brisk, their ways had separated.

To induce this man to lay the lines, Borg had concealed the fact that it was a question of salmon; the conservative fisherman would have refused to have anything to do with an enterprise which appeared to him in the light of a senseless waste of effort. He therefore

gave him to understand that it was a new method of catching cod, a method by which the very largest fish could be caught.

As Axel Borg was rowing out to sea with Vestman after his isolation of a whole month, and listened to the sound of his voice, it struck him that it was less resonant, and had changed its timbre from want of use. It seemed to be the voice of a stranger. Talking threw him into a state of ecstasy. His brain whose only medium of expression had been the pen, burst through the flood-gates of his larynx; his thoughts gushed forth like a waterfall, giving birth to new thoughts on their way.

Allowed to pour out his ideas, with a human ear as a sounding board, without interruption, without being asked a single question, he imagined that he had found an intelligent listener. After their first expedition he was convinced that Vestman was the most intelligent man he had come across for a long time.

Their intercourse lasted for one week. He initiated the fisherman into the secrets of nature; explained the effect of the moon on the surface of the sea; warned him not to believe that things are what they appear to be. He told him that the moon was pear-shaped, although she had the appearance of being round; he said that it was not absolutely proved that the earth was round . . .

Vestman pulled a face and for the first time ventured a remark: 'But it says so in the almanack!'

Borg saw that he had gone too far, and that it was time to turn back; but it was too late. He could not talk to Vestman of the more recent discoveries, according to which the shape of the earth is an ellipsoid with three axes; it required knowledge which Vestman did not possess. He changed his subject. He talked of mirages and asked him whether anybody had been to the Swordholm and seen the havoc he had made.

'Oh! yes,' replied Vestman, 'we know that somebody's been there; but nobody lands there now, and fishing and sheep-farming has been abandoned.'

After this confession Borg shut himself up again, ashamed of having become the victim of a delusion, ashamed of having believed that the fisherman had understood what he had told him. He had been speaking against a wall, and had taken the echo for another man's voice.

A week later there was tremendous excitement on the skerry. Vestman had caught a salmon, weighing twenty-six pounds.

As he considered himself the inventor of the new industry, a paragraph soon appeared in

the newspaper. A new industry for the Stockholm Archipelago had been discovered since the strömming had been on the decline. The lucky fisherman, Eric Vestman, a customs official, deserved the respect and gratitude of his fellow citizens . . .

Shortly after a weekly publication for the people brought a venomous attack on Superintendents of Fisheries who know nothing, but think they can teach everybody . . .

It was followed by a letter from the Agricultural College, requesting Superintendent Borg to furnish more detailed reports on the fishing industry; more especially on the salmon fishery.

Borg replied by sending in his resignation.

## CHAPTER XIX

Now that he was no longer of any importance in the eyes of the people and had lost what little support his official position had given him, Axel Borg soon became aware that the natives, convinced that he *had been turned out*, were firmly resolved to drive him away from the skerry.

They began hostilities by unmooring his boat from the landing stage under the pretext that there was not sufficient room; the boat was thrown on the shore and broken to pieces.

On the next rainy day he noticed that the rain came through the ceiling of his attic. He complained of it to Oeman with the result that the rain penetrated into the other rooms as well, although there was not a tile missing.

A little later on burglars broke into his cellar. The blame was laid on some men from Esthland.

The intention of driving him away was unmistakable, but he determined to defy his foes. The only way of doing this was by ceasing to



complain and bearing the outrages with apparent indifference.

He really was surrounded by enemies now and as he had cut himself adrift from the society of his equals he fell a victim to the fear of the outcast.

He slept badly in spite of all his attempts to regulate his dreams by strong auto-suggestions before falling asleep. Sometimes he awoke from a dream that he was a bell-buoy, drifting and drifting in search of a shore on which he could be thrown. And in his sleep he had pressed close against the bedstead, so as to feel the contact of some object, even if it were an inanimate one.

Sometimes he was hovering in mid-air, unable to rise or fall. Once, as he came round from a fainting fit, he found himself clutching the pillow with both his hands.

Memories of his dead mother haunted him; the mother, origin and link between conscious and unconscious life, mediator and consoler. He often dreamt that he was again a little baby, sleeping in her arms. Childish thoughts of meeting her again in another life filled his mind. His first thoughts of suicide were suggested by his longing to find her somewhere, in another world, in which he did not believe.

Science was powerless to help a moribund spirit which had lost all interest in life. His brain had fought until it was tired out. His imagination worked without a regulator.

He was still about when Christmas approached, but he ate little and took ether at night. He loathed life and smiled at his former ambitions. The rain had spoilt his books and papers; his instruments were covered with rust and verdigris.

He had ceased caring for his personal appearance; his beard was untrimmed; his hair matted; he disliked water; his linen had not been washed for a long time; he had no eye for uncleanness. Buttons were missing on his clothes; his waistcoat was spotted with grease; the hand which guided knife and fork no longer obeyed his will.

When he went into the street the children made fun of him and called him names.

One morning he was again surrounded by a little tribe of children. They pulled his coat. When he turned round, one of them flung a stone which hit his chin so violently that blood began to flow. He burst into tears and begged them not to be unkind to him.

'Time you kicked the bucket, you crazy devil,' shouted a boy of twelve. 'We don't want to have to keep you!'

And all of them began to throw stones at him. But Oeman's servant rushed out of the cottage and seized the boy by the hair. When she had chastised him she turned to the victim and with her apron wiped the blood from his face.

'Poor little gentleman,' she said.

He laid his head on her ample bosom.

'Let me stay with you,' he faltered.

The girl pushed him from her. 'Get out!' she said harshly, and went back into the cottage.

One evening, a few days later, Vestman's servant came running to his cottage and begged Dr Borg to visit her mistress, who was dying.

The message was a little unexpected, but with that clear-sightedness which distinguished his illness at saner moments, he suspected foul play, and the intention to make use of his name and title to avoid a post mortem examination. The matter was indifferent to him, but it roused him for the moment. Something had happened; the unusual had made an impression on his mind.

He went to the custom house and was received by the two brothers with a suspicious politeness. But he said nothing; asked no questions; he wanted to compel the man to

confess by forcing him to open the conversation, convinced that the first sentence would give him away.

The little girl was silently eating a piece of saffron bread by the light of a tallow candle.

She was dressed in her Sunday clothes probably to make her feel solemn and keep her quiet.

After Borg had looked round the room and noticed that Vestman's brother had crept away, he went to the bed on which the dead woman lay.

He saw at once that she was dead. He could tell from the contracted muscles of her face that she had died by violence. When he saw that her hair was carefully combed across the parting, he had no doubt that the good old method of the nail had been chosen.

But he was determined to make Vestman speak first; he turned to him with half-open lips and eloquent eyes, apparently on the point of asking a question. Vestman allowed himself to be deceived and believing that he was speaking to a madman, with whom he need not be very much on his guard, he said :

'You might certify, doctor, that she is dead, then we could bury her straight away; no need to tell you that poor people like we can't afford to send for a doctor.'

Borg had heard enough. He looked at Vestman, who was now perfectly calm, and whispered :

‘Where’s the hammer?’

Vestman took a step or two back, as if he meant to throw himself upon his opponent and strangle him. Borg disarmed him by a look at the child. The man stood before him, shaking.

‘He has no idea where the hammer is, but I know where the nail can be found,’ continued Borg, imperturbably. ‘Oh! you self-sufficient donkeys who cannot invent anything new but, like children, always hide in the same spot when they play hide and seek. Surely this nailing of the brain was invented in the Middle-Ages by a priest or a nobleman and has only now reached the lower classes, instead of being, as is always stated, a proof of their cunning. Everything comes from those above : salmon, arsenic, nail, gun-shots, revolutions, national freedom, wealth, folklore, dialect, peasants’ intrigues, anthropological museums. But only by theft; you mob, you’d rather steal than take a gift, for you are too petty to say thank you. ‘Therefore you drive your benefactors into the mad-houses and your noblemen to the scaffold. Take me to an asylum now, it will save you from prison.’

• When he had gone back to his cottage, he realised that the pleasure of speaking his mind to Vestman had made him commit an indiscretion. He knew the people's character and was well aware that fear for his own safety might induce the murderer to silence a dangerous witness. Henceforth he slept with his revolver by his bedside and his sleep was troubled by evil dreams.

On the following day he remained at home; he noticed white sheets hanging before the windows of the custom house.

On the third day the body was brought out and carried into a boat.

On the fourth the men returned to the skerry.

After that Borg slept no more, and insomnia completed the work of destruction. Dread of insanity and confinement in a lunatic asylum, and the fear of being murdered, strengthened his resolution to put an end to his life.

And now that he was contemplating death, and the close of a life, the extinction of a family, perhaps, was at hand, his sexual instinct awoke, manifesting itself in the passionate desire for a child.

He tried to satisfy this longing by scientific experiments. Once, for a brief moment, a flash of hope lit up the gloom which sur-

rounded him. But it was followed by complete failure. Magnified by his sick soul, his pain grew into mourning, mourning for his dead hope. There was now no bond between this life and the next. He had no strength to begin afresh. Half-delirious, he imagined himself a wrecked vessel, tossed on the waves, between air and water, until at last he felt the jerk of the anchor chain and had a feeling of stability, as if his connexion with the solid earth had been re-established.

Strong warm fingers gripped his right hand. He pressed them without looking up, merely for the sake of feeling himself in touch with a living soul. He seemed to be conscious of an inpouring of strength, as the weaker nerve-current was connected with the stronger.

'What's the matter?' It was the preacher's voice, talking somewhere above his head.

'If you were a woman, life would still be possible to me, for the woman is the man's root in the earth,' replied the sick man, for the first time talking familiarly to his old school-fellow.

'Congratulate yourself for having got rid of the foul root!'

'Without root we cannot grow and blossom!'

'But with such a woman, Borg!'

'Such a woman? Do you know who she was? I never knew.'

‘Then you need only know that she was the sort a man doesn’t marry. But she’s engaged again . . .’

‘To him?’

‘To him. I read it in the paper, yesterday.’

After a moment’s silence, the preacher rose to go, but the sick man held him back.

‘Tell me a fairy tale,’ he begged, childishly imploring him.

‘A fairy tale?’

‘Yes, a fairy tale. Tell me about Tom Thumb. Do, please.’

The preacher sat down again, and when he saw that Borg was serious, he humoured him.

The sick man listened attentively and when the preacher, according to his habit, tried to point a moral, he interrupted him and begged him to keep to his story.

‘It does one good to hear the old fairy tales again! It’s like taking a rest; like diving into the sweetest memories of a time when one was a little animal and loved the useless and the senseless. Now repeat to me the Lord’s prayer!’

‘You have no faith in the Lord’s prayer!’

‘No more than in the fairy tales. But it does one good in the same way. When death approaches and one is slipping down, one loves old things and becomes conservative. Repeat



the Lord's prayer and you shall be my heir; I will destroy your promissory note if you will pray.'

The preacher hesitated for a moment, but finally he began to pray.

At first the sick man listened silently; then his lips moved inaudibly, and finally he pronounced the words with the intonation of a man who is praying.

'It is good to pray, I believe,' said the preacher, after the prayer had come to an end.

'It's like medicine. The old words awaken memories and strengthen the heart, just as they used to strengthen the heart of the self-unconscious man, who sought God outside himself. Do you know what God is? He is the fixed point for which Archimedes longed, on which to build up the earth. He is the magnet in the earth which we postulate, because without it the movements of the magnetic needle would be inexplicable. He is the ether which we had to invent to fill empty space. He is the molecule without which the chemical laws would be a miracle. Give me more hypotheses, above everything else give me the fixed point outside myself, for I am cut quite adrift.'

'Shall I speak to you of our Lord Jesus?' asked the preacher, imagining that Borg was delirious.

'No! Not of Jesus! He is neither a fairy tale nor a hypothesis. He is an invention of revengeful slaves and evil women; he is the god of the invertebrate, as opposed to the god of the vertebrate . . . but—let me see, I am one of the invertebrate. Speak of Jesus! who associated with publicans and loose women as I have had to do; who said that the poor in spirit should inherit the kingdom of heaven, because they can't govern the earth; who taught artisans to be idle, and beggars, loafers and wastrels, who possess nothing, to share all things with the industrious!'

'Blasphemer, I'm not your fool!' interrupted the preacher, rising from his chair.

'Don't go! Don't go!' exclaimed the sick man. 'Hold my hand, let me hear your voice. Talk to me of anything you like! Read to me from the almanack or the bible, I don't care which! Only drive away the *horror vacui*, the fear of the empty void!'

'Do you admit, then, that you are afraid of death?'

'Yes, I am, as all things living which, without this fear, would never have lived! But I'm not afraid of the judgment. The work judges the master; I have not made myself!'

But the preacher had gone.

## CHAPTER XX

It was Christmas Eve. After a stormy night during which he had heard shots and shouts and screams from human voices, Borg was taking a stroll in the newly fallen snow. The sky was blue-black like sheet iron; the breakers flung themselves on to the shore, and the bell-buoy screamed incessantly, as if it were shouting for assistance.

A large, black steamer, whose scarlet bottom shone like a bleeding lacerated breast, was lying south-east. The funnel with its white ring was broken and lay on one side. Dark figures clung to masts and yards, writhing like earth-worms on a fishing hook. The waves were washing parcels, bales, wooden and cardboard boxes from a cleft in the centre of the boat; the heavier ones sank to the bottom, but the lighter ones were tossed on the shore.

Indifferent to the fate of the shipwrecks, like a man who looks upon death as a boon, he wandered along the shore and came to the headland with a pile of stones surmounted by

the cross. Here the sea was more turbulent than in any other spot, and the green waves dandled and tossed objects of strange shape and colour, above which the sea-gulls screamed furiously, as if disappointed in their greedy anticipation of prey.

As he gazed at the strange shapes which floated nearer and nearer, it struck him that they were little, well-dressed children. Some of them had fair curls, others were dark; their cheeks were pink and white; their wide-open eyes stared at the black sky, immovable and without blinking. When they came closer to the shore, he saw that the eyes of some of them moved when the waves rocked them, as if they were making him signs to save them. The next breaker flung five of them on the shore.

The craving for a child was so firmly rooted in his soft brain, that it never occurred to him that the little shipwrecks were dolls on their way to the Christmas fair, when disaster had overtaken the belated vessel. He gathered his little foundlings, given to him by the great mother, the sea, into his arms, and pressing them to his breast, ran back to his cottage to dry them.

But he had nothing with which to make a fire, for the natives had refused to sell him wood. He did not feel the cold, but he was

determined that his little Christmas guests should be warm. He broke up his bookshelves, made a blazing fire in the large fireplace, pushed the sofa close to it and sat the little ones in a row before the flames.

When the idea occurred to him that they could not get dry unless he undressed them, he began to take off their wet clothes; but realising that they were girls, he left them their little chemises.

Then he washed their hands and feet with his sponge, combed their hair, re-dressed them, and put them to sleep.

It was as if he had visitors. He walked about on tip-toe for fear of waking them.

He had something for which he could live; something for which he could care, which he could love.

He went back to the sofa to look at the sleeping children; he noticed that their eyes were open; he thought that the light prevented them from falling asleep and pulled down the blinds.

The room was almost dark; an irresistible drowsiness overcame him. It was caused by hunger, but he was no longer able to localise the cause of his sensations; he could not tell whether he was hungry or thirsty.

As the sofa was taken up by the children, he lay down on the floor and soon fell asleep.

It was quite dark in the room when he awoke, but the door was wide open and a woman with a lighted lantern stood on the threshold.

'The Lord have mercy upon us! He's lying on the floor!' exclaimed Oeman's servant. 'Don't you know that it's Christmas day, sir?'

He had slept for over twenty four hours, until the afternoon of the next day.

He arose, dazed. He missed something; the customs officials had been and claimed the wreckage, but he could not remember what it was he missed. He was only conscious of a terrible blank, a great mourning.

'You must come to Oeman's and eat Christmas pudding; we're all Christians at Christmas time. Oh, dear, oh, dear; what misery!'

And the girl began to cry.

'To see a Christian go down like that; it's enough to make one weep tears of blood! Come with me, sir! Come along with me!' Borg motioned her to go, giving her to understand that he would follow.

When she had gone, he remained in his room for a few more minutes, took the lantern which she had left on the floor, and looked into the glass.

When he saw his face looking like the face

of a savage, a light seemed to dawn on him, and he pulled himself together for a last effort.

Leaving the lantern on the floor, he went out.

The wind had veered to the west and had gone down a little; the atmosphere was clear and the stars glittered in the deep-blue sky.

Guided by the lights in the cottage windows, he went down to the harbour, stole into a sea-booth and brought out some sails.

He hoisted them, unmoored the boat, sat down at the helm, and a wind blowing from the stern drove him straight out to sea.

He cruised for a little while; he wanted to have a last look at the place where he had suffered so much. But when he saw the candles in a three-armed candlestick burning in the window of the custom-house, where the murderer celebrated the birth of Christ, the forgiver of sins, the idol of all weaklings and criminals, behind whom all the evil formerly punished by the civil code sheltered, he turned away, spat, and took full advantage of the wind.

With his back to the land he sailed below the starry sky, steering a course to a star of the second magnitude, between the Lyre and the Corona, in the east. It seemed to him to shine more brilliantly than the rest. A vague

memory of the star of Bethelhem stirred his mind; a dim recollection of a pilgrimage of three dethroned kings, three fallen stars, journeying to Bethlehem, to worship their own smallness in the humblest of all beings, who eventually became the chosen god of all those who were small and of no account.

No, this could not be his star, for the Christian magicians had brought darkness to the earth, and as a punishment there was not a single point of light in the heavens which bore their name. Therefore they celebrated the darkest season—how sublimely ridiculous—by lighting wax candles.

Suddenly a ray of light illuminated his darkened memory. It was the star Beta in the constellation Hercules!

Hercules, the moral ideal of the Greek, the god of strength and wisdom, who killed the Lernaean hydra with its hundred heads, cleansed the stables of Augias, caught the man-eating mares of Diomedes, robbed the Queen of the Amazons of her belt, and brought Cerberus from the gates of hell, finally to perish through the stupidity of a woman who, from sheer love, poisoned him, after he had served Omphale, the nymph, for three years, insane . . .

Away, to meet him, whom the gods had



received into Olympus, who had never permitted himself to be flogged and spat at without retaliating. Away, to meet him who had burnt himself to death, who could only fall by his own strong hand, and who had never prayed for mercy. Away, to meet Hercules, who had released the light-bringer, Prometheus, who was the son of a god and a human mother, perverted by his savage detractors into the child of a virgin, adored at his birth by milk-drinking shepherds and neighing donkeys. °

Away, towards the new Christmas star, across the sea, the All-mother, in whose lap was kindled the first spark of life; the inexhaustible bourne of fertility and love, the origin of life and its foe.

THE END

